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PCZONE

ISSUE 177 FEBRUARY 2007

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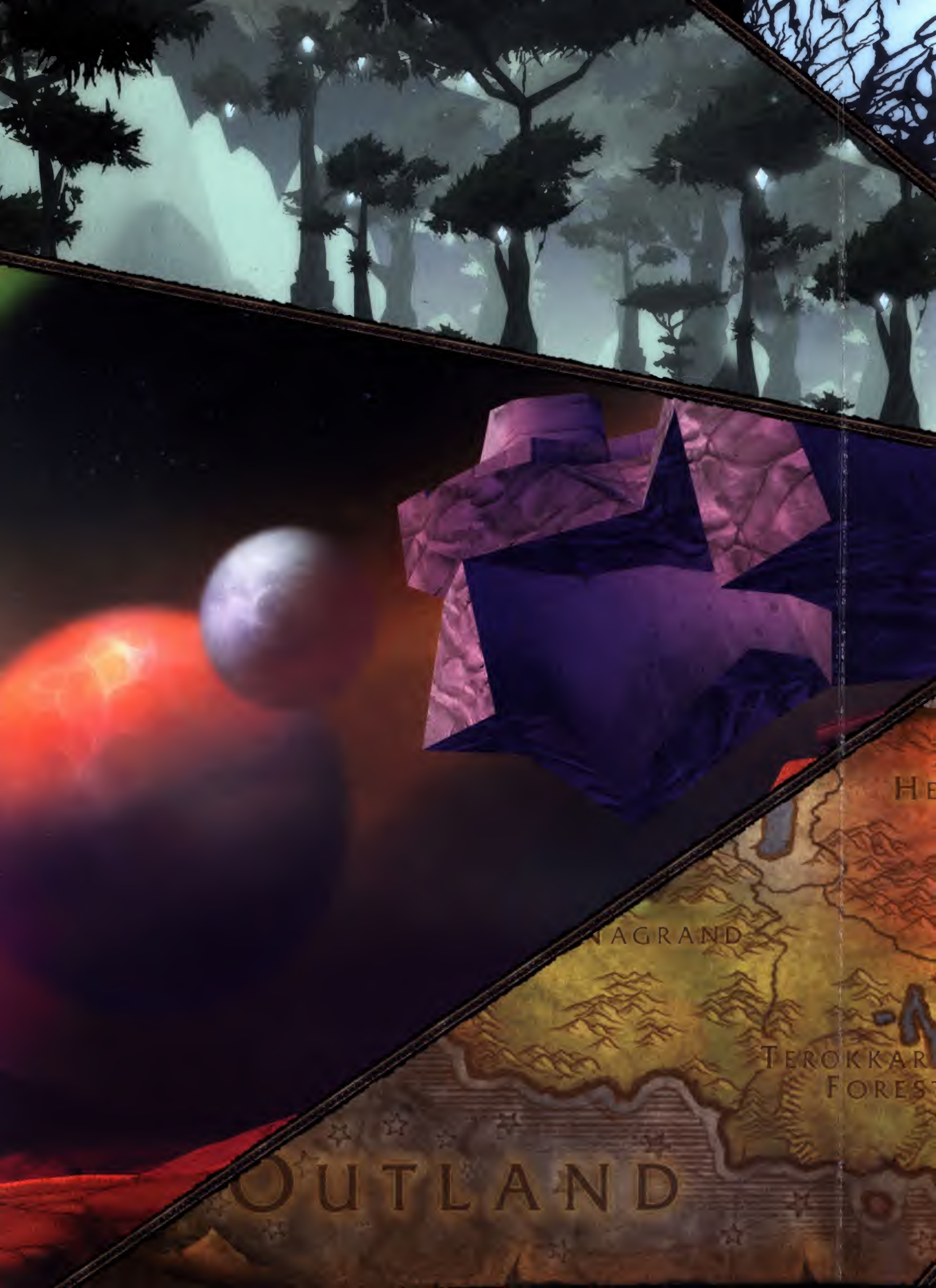




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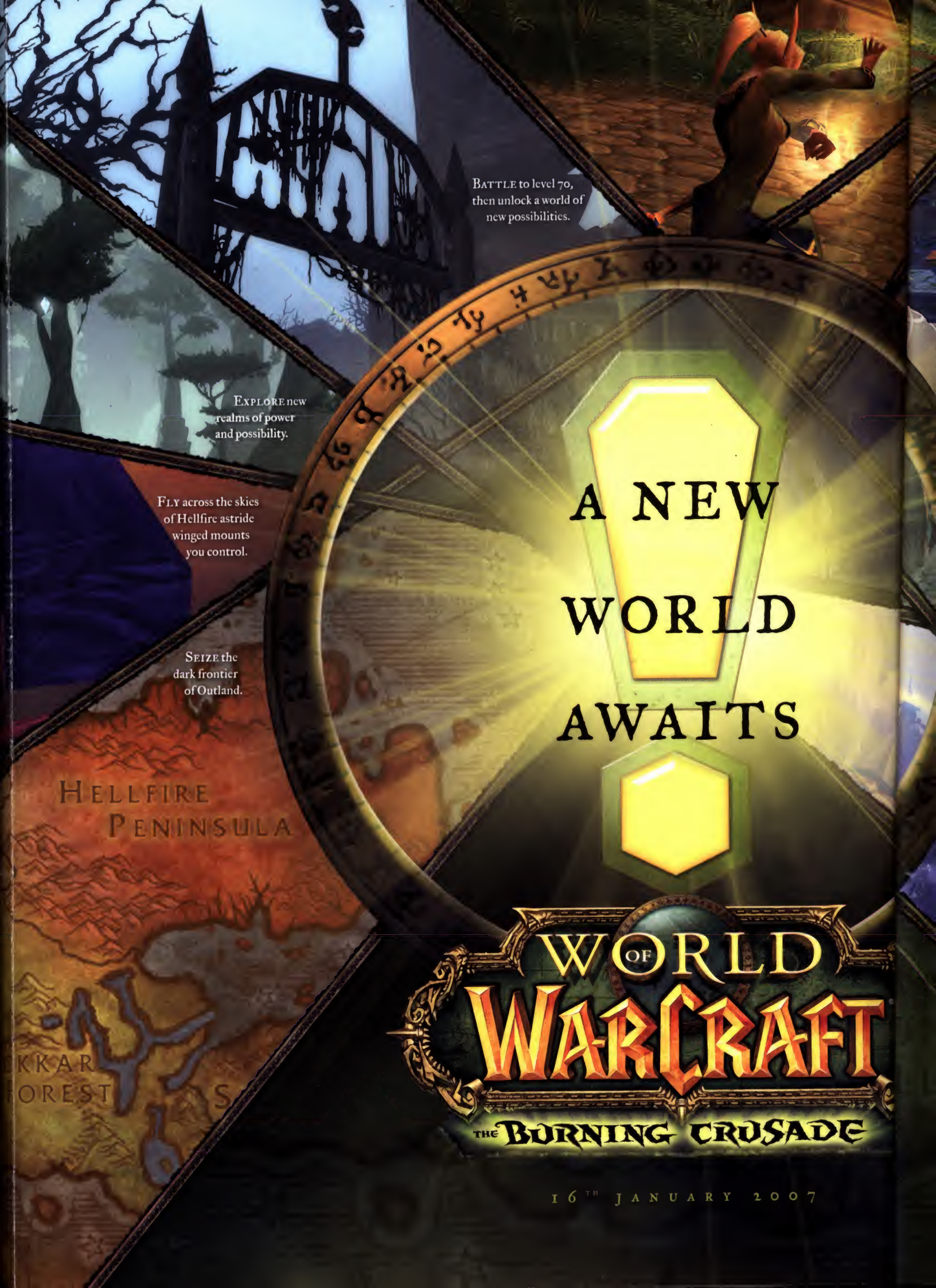


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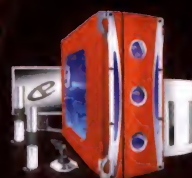
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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

26 BIOSHOCK

If your utopian society had mutated into a murderous nightmare, you'd be grumpy too...

NEVERQUEST 121

"It's the fresh air to air orifices," says Chilli, confusingly...



MYSTIC WILL
PORTER'S EERIE INSIGHTS INTO
THE GAMING HIGHLIGHTS OF 2007

44

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 54 words... We've gone precog on you this month, with a huge section devoted to the thrills of the next 12 months. No stupid Top 10 for our readers - we're bubbling over the saucepan rim like hot milk over 34 titles. That means we're 3.4 times more better than any magazine who did a Top 10.



2007 HEAVEN

WELL, 2006 IS now as stale as those leftover turkey slices (or turkey-flavoured Quorn slices if you're a vegetarian) that you unwisely decided to seal in an air-tight food bag and leave festering at the back of the fridge. There were a number of PC ZONE Classics - *Company Of Heroes* and *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* to name two - but 2007 has the potential to be a vastly superior year for PC gaming.

This issue we've hand-picked the most mouth-watering selection of titles, to present you with over 40 pages of essential new screenshots, interviews and gameplay nuggets, kicking off with Irrational's horror-shooter/RPG *BioShock* (complete with our exclusive free *BioShock* calendar). However, we've also secured the world's first images and info on the first proper *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* expansion, *Shivering Isles* (page 48), plus exclusives on *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* (page 52), *Hellgate: London* (page 50), *Crysis* (page 38) and *The Lord Of The Rings Online* (page 60).

Along with the imminent release of Windows Vista and DirectX 10, giving PCs access to graphics that'll surpass anything spluttered out on next-gen consoles, the PC is about to enjoy a gaming renaissance. Happy new year? Abso-bloody-lutely.

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

A guided tour of the office on a busy Friday afternoon

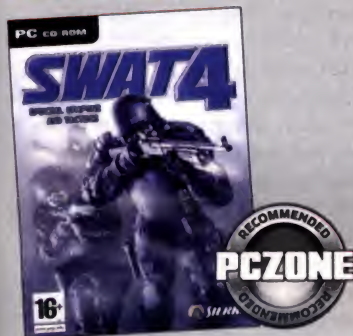
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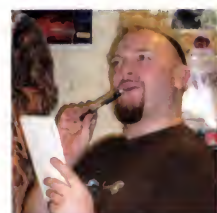
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**Turn to page 116 for
more information**



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Word Serf

AGE: 32

LIKES: Cheeky winks

DISLIKES: Cheeky scamps

FANCIES: Robbie Coltrane

FAV GAME: System Shock 2

PLAYING NOW: Medieval II: Total
War and (of course) WOW

Hi, I'm Log, and I'd like to invite you on a journey through the PC ZONE offices. See through my eyes, hear what I hear. I'd say feel what I feel, but I don't know where your hands have been so let's not go that far. In real-time land, it's a Friday afternoon in December, and the sense of impending weekend is becoming unbearable. So, in an attempt to keep a grip on my increasingly elusive sanity, I'm going to spend the rest of my working week looking at my colleagues and telling you what they're doing. Especially if they're picking their noses and eating it.

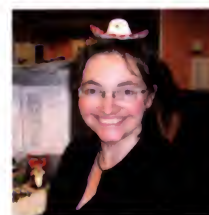


STEVE HOGARTY

Prince of Verbiage

As I write this, Steve is hungover, staring into space, and recovering from the longest game presentation ever. What game was it? We won't know till Steve has regained the power of speech.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Lock-On

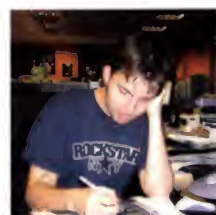


CLARE LYDON

Queen of the Airwaves

Our cheerful torturer Clare reasons that the best way of getting us to hit deadlines is to keep us disorientated and terrified by playing ABBA. It's like Guantanamo Bay round here.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
More ABBA Gold

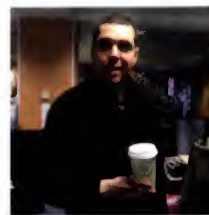


WILL PORTER

Number Two

Will has just given me a bunch of captions to write because he's got somewhere important to go. To teach him a lesson, I'm going to caption every image with vile profanities.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
CS: Fawltly Towers

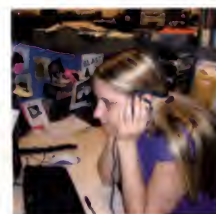


JAMIE SEFTON

The Great Satan

Jamie's not at his desk, so I can only speculate what he's up to. Perhaps he's out scrumping apples. Perhaps he's on the roof like Captain Jack in *Torchwood*. Oh, here he comes. With a coffee.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Company Of Heroes

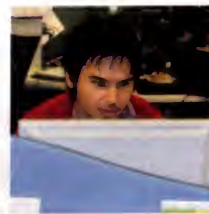


SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Lord

Suzy has her headphones on. She might be playing a game - I can't see her monitor. More likely, she's listening to a blend of industrial machinery and abattoir noises to drown out the ABBA.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Dark Messiah



DALE PRATLEY

CMYK Wizard

Thanks to the layout of the office, I can't see what Dale is doing. He certainly looks busy, but that could be a face he's learned to stop people giving him work. He's probably looking at knickers online.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
"Nothing - I'm the art guy!"

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... 2GB USB flash pen drives and cans of Relentless (it's like two cans of Red Bull in a single, twice-as-big can - only three times sweeter!)

STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Flight Sim readme files; farckin trains being a liberty; it raining neither Catz nor Dogz

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

STEVE HILL HEAD SHENANIGANS 25 Mins Former Ed Dave Woods claims patent on putting Steve Hill's head over boobies. War ensues

EAST 17 23 Mins If that Christmas album doesn't get taken off soon, someone won't be "staying another day"

'MUTLI-PLAYER' 4 Mins Actually a typo, but also a good analysis of *Wacky Races*

"HUXLEY, YOU'VE DROOLED ON THE CLUES!" 35 Mins Possible dialogue from upcoming MMOFPS *Huxley*, if Huxley were a crime-solving dog

STEVE'S HAIR ON PAGE 101 50 Mins Is he a Lego man, or a 1980s private dick? Either way he looks silly!

BLAGGING STUDENT MATES INTO A FREE BAR 67 Mins Sometimes not always quite as good an idea as it sounds

IS 'KNICK KNACK PADDY WACK' RACIST? 15 Mins It's from another century, so you've got to be careful. Everything was racist then

LITTLE DRUMMER BOY? 5 Mins Seriously, isn't this cruel? Can't we take it to an industrial tribunal?

MARTIN KORDA WITH A GUN 13 Mins Actually less scary than Martin Korda wanting to give you a loving bearhug

THE INIMITABLE OLEG MADDOX 20 Mins Did the inventor of *IL-2* steal Hogarty's joystick? Someone call Huxley the crime-solving dog!

WIN!

The tiny compo is so small that to the human ear it just goes "meep meep meep". That's why we've trained mice to translate its squeaks into real words, so that you, the reader, can win tiny prizes. Tiny compo 175 was won by Ellesmere Port's Neil Kelly, who'll be receiving something disposable and worthless very soon. Send this month's entries - together with your most-wanted game this year - to Tiny Web Compo 177, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Crikey!

Closing date: May 1, 2007

LETTERS

Red-letter day? *Jamie Sefton* accepts any colour...



A TIME TO DIE

Thanks for the cool die that came with issue 175. It's changed my life! Lotto numbers to play? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Number of nights a week to go out partying? 6. Days to take off work? 5. How many goodies can I eat at the barbeque? 6. Yes, all was good till the morning after the barbeque when I found I needed to empty my bowels of all those goodies I'd eaten the previous night. However, I rolled the dice again to see how many sheets of toilet paper to use and I rolled a 1! On a more serious note, I really do love the dice and was just wondering if it was possible to get the other three in the collection? I'd love to have the full set. Paul Boland

Glad you loved the free die, Paul. Unfortunately we didn't get a set of all four dice from the manufacturers, but we somehow managed to get about 500 of the blue ones. The fun we have throwing them all! I suppose we could spare one for you so you can double your chances of avoiding future 'paper trouble'.

FOOTBALL CRAZY

I was thinking recently – wouldn't it be great to have first-person football games? It would be fantastic online, as you could have one player each. We have loads of football games – PES, FIFA, Sensi – but they're all very similar. What a great change it would be if you could set it to first-person. You could have real clan games and train your player in a certain aspect such as agility or skill. It would be just like playing in a real football match! Jordan Higgins

Aha – there is such a game, Jordan. It's a footie mod for *Half-Life* called *International Online Soccer*. You can visit the website – www.iosoccer.com – for downloads and news on the forthcoming Source version.

MASSIVELY MONOTONOUS

MMOs have become a massive franchise within the last year or so, but they seem to completely lack differentiation. Even the *Auto Assault* game Steve Hill recently dallied through doesn't deviate much from the traditional template of 'kill some monsters, level-up, repeat until you have a beard and no social life'. The RPG genre seems to be the only one exploiting the MMO format. Why hasn't someone come up with another complicated abbreviation for us to memorise? MMOFPS has only been touched on, and MMORTS remains a completely untapped genre. The games industry is constantly striving for originality, but



Our dice had a profound impact on some readers.

flagrantly ignores templates for potentially great games such as these. Jack Chapman

Have you tried saying MMOFPS in a drunken pub conversation? That probably goes some way to explain the lack of any popular ones. Seriously though, *PlanetSide* was the last decent persistent online shooter, but had plenty of gameplay and technical problems. We reckon *Huxley* could be fantastic, and Richard Garriott's *Tabula Rasa* is worth a look-see to boot (see page 61 for news on both). With the phenomenal success of *WOW*, I'm sure there are many other games companies thinking the same thing as you Jack. Watch this space.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Who in your wonderful team cannot count? There's a screenshot in the *Scarface: The World Is Yours* review in issue 175, page 90, that says, 'That's +1,300 balls! Call Norris McWhirter!' However, the screenshot says Balls+20, Balls+1,000 and Balls+10 which equals 1,030 balls, does it not? Alfred Cotton



Letter of the month

Flying the PC flag

In Pavel Barter's superb report on the future of PC gaming in issue 176, I was surprised that one very big advantage of PC gaming over console gaming was missed out – both the independent games industry and the modding community. I've played some amazing mods recently, such as *Minerva Metastasis*, *Combine Destiny* and others for *Half-Life 2*, and also some brilliant indie games including *Armadillo Run*, *Professor Fizzwizzle* and *Gibbage*. This isn't as accessible for console players and is a great way for people to express their creative talent – in fact, I'm going off to finish that sprite I started yesterday... Mark

Well said Mark. Although Pavel was concentrating on commercial games companies' view of the PC platform, it's absolutely the case that the most vibrant and exciting indie and mod communities are due to our beloved Windows box. You can have the graphics card on the strict understanding that you have to produce a brand-new, genre-exploding indie game by the end of the year. Deal?

WIN!



ONE OF THESE!

Can you feel the love tonight? Here at PC ZONE we're awash with it, which is why if you write us a letter and we deem it to be the best of the month, we'll reward you with PNY's limited-edition 7600GT PCI-E *Splinter Cell* bundle, retailing for £99.99. For more info on PNY Technologies, please refer to www.PNY-Europe.com

SAY WHAT?

"Irrespective of the motives of the perpetrators, it is bullying, it is child abuse and it is unpoliced"

Mat Westhorpe is disturbed by the plight of minors in *Battlefield 2*

Well spotted Alfred – it was Will Porter with the maths/number problems. However, I'm reluctant to criticise young Will, because it means I can pay him stupidly low wages without him ever noticing...

COMPANY OF ZEROES

Please can you tell me: WHAT IS THE FUSS ABOUT *Company Of Heroes*? I bought the game, got all excited about it after reading all the reviews and watching the clips. Got home, loaded it up – what the hell happened? I can't see anything new and exciting that *Rome: Total War*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* or *Command & Conquer* hasn't done before. Like you said yourselves, it's just polished up a bit from the other RTS games. Now, if we could only go *inside* the buildings and go up stairs and do the usual WWII thing of clearing out houses, running over enemy troops with tanks like in *Call Of Duty*, but in a real-time strategy game – that's the game I want. I'm probably going to be very unpopular over these comments, but someone has to do it. Or am I just hard to please? Bring on *Medieval II: Total War* though – that looks great!

Mike Plumpton

Hard to please Mike? Nah. *Company Of Heroes* is a fantastic RTS, and is currently top of our strategy Buyer's Guide because it's enormous fun, easy to play and looks amazing. We know there's an expansion later this year, but I don't think they're going after the kind of room-clearing and tank-driving action you describe. Who knows, maybe we'll see it in *Company Of Heroes 2*?

ONLINE BULLYING?

Recently, I've been privy to some worrying incidents while playing *Battlefield 2* online. For the most part the community is friendly, tending to be composed of European English-speaking males. My concerns arise from the odd occasion when we've been joined by an American child, when the

previously jovial banter between the Europeans is silenced as one or more of the (usually UK-based) players proceeds to bait and verbally abuse them. Irrespective of the motives of the perpetrators or the nationality of the victims, it is bullying, it is child abuse and it is unpoliced.

Measures are in place via the likes of Punkbuster to regulate abusive language in written form, but there's no way to do the same with speech. I have no desire to add fuel to the machinations of the *Daily Mail*-sponsored anti-gaming movement, but sadly this kind of behaviour – from what is undoubtedly a minority – could have repercussions, as no games developer or publisher would want to be seen to be providing an environment for this kind of antisocial and abusive treatment of minors.

Mat Westhorpe

It's an interesting topic Mat. As someone who's often been insulted by annoying US teens while



What do you think of *Neverwinter Nights 2*? IMHO so far so good – the graphics aren't bad and the story seems pretty dramatic. It's a chronic resource hog though.

simon_blackwell1

It got a decent review score, but as of yet I'm behind when it comes to the RPG. Hell, I'm still fighting through *Baldur's Gate II: Throne Of Baal*.

rain1971

I think *Sacred* is a happy medium for combining fast action and a more in-depth RPG (I really should get back to playing it, but it's such a huge game I never feel like I'm getting anywhere).

randomsimian

So far so good. Nice graphics, but feels slightly rushed with some of the models. Some of the UV mapping of the skins isn't the best. Otherwise, it's a very solid game. Actually makes me want to take *D&D* up again...

Foshjedi2004

Join in the forum larks at www.pczone.co.uk

PINK FREUD

After our metallic Dr Jung wiped his memory banks in a tryst with a babe magnet, we fashioned Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) from flesh, fabric and pins. With his research team of 700 toy poodles, Pink Freud exists only to answer your questions...



Send your gaming questions and queries to letters@pczone.co.uk

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q I'm sure I read somewhere that the excellent *Natural Selection* mod was being updated and released for the Source engine. Please tell me this is true, as it was one of my favourite *Half-Life* mods.

Darren Pattinson

A Natural selection, eh? All that sex. Animals doing it all day long – a perpetual parade of mind-blowing orgasms. It's so shocking I can barely stop thinking about it. However, I'm pleased to tell you that Unknown Worlds are working on a fully commercial sequel to their clever FPS-RTS blended mod. Even better, the team are still supporting their original mod, so you can while away the weeks with the new release of v3.2.

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q Reading your underrated games feature reminded me how much I enjoyed *Tribes: Vengeance*. Are VU Games going to release any more *Tribes* games?

Peter Harris

A Not one to mince words, are you Peter? You were straight in and out with that question. But as much as I could sit here and talk about in and out all day, I'll answer your question. It's not a happy answer, Peter. *Tribes: Vengeance* performed so badly that the series was put on hiatus, and the numbers now playing the game are disturbingly low. Don't blame me, blame the millions of gamers who didn't buy it. A number that, I daresay, includes your mother – is this why you hate her so much, Peter?

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

PCZONE Around the World



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

Star Wars II is indeed a wonderful game, made all the more attractive by of the amount of bonus stuff and hidden areas. Most games, you'll play through once and put away, but some titles are worth getting out every now and again for a replay. In particular, I'm hoping *Resident Evil 4* on PC will keep the 'Mercenaries' survival mode – one of the best unlockable games ever.

HORSE PWNAGE

By using my favourite weapon in *GUN* (Loco Dynamite Bow) I decided to just annihilate the inhabitants of the badlands. Here's a screenshot...

Paul Watson

Great work Paul! Yep, those cold nights in Drumoak, Scotland must simply fly by...



Just LOL'd on the bus at "It's a fake poo! And its NEAR MY BOOTS!" Funny stares ensued. Gabanski83

When da HELL r u reviewing NFS: Carbon? i want it now u bastards. Rracer

Is it me or do alot of the npcs from oblivion look like pcz's ste hill? NOX

Hey pcz, cud u do a hole page of forum coments, dat wud b gr8, den i might b in there. A forumer

TEXTS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 160 CHARACTERS LONG, SO PAY ATTENTION! To txt (text) this magnificent gaming rag, send your mssgs (messages) to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leaving a space, then continuing with your text – and don't forget to include your name.

By texting PC ZONE, you're agreeing to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties, that may or may not include double glazing salesmen, pornographers and Hoxton fin-wearing marketing scumbags. If you don't want to receive info relating to future offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate. Bargain.

playing online games, I tend to have little sympathy for the brats. However, you're right in that this is a non-regulated system that is open to possible abuse. We'll be looking into this with a Special Report soon...

ROCKING BLOCKS

Wow! The giants of the industry have been completely outclassed by the little people! I'm talking, of course, about Traveller's Tales' wonderful *Lego Star Wars II* game. I can't stop gushing because of the amount of love that's obviously gone into making this such a stimulating product.

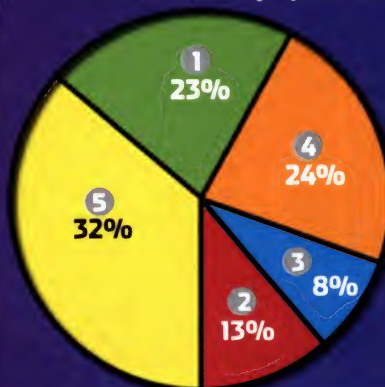
In particular, the attention paid to exactly what the punter has been gagging for – replay value, something

that big-hitters like *Prey*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Quake 4* and *Call Of Duty* seem to lack. Other products have been a disappointing affair – once I've seen them through to climax I never bother with them again – but this title is different. I loved how *Lego Star Wars* begged you to revisit each level in free play mode to really maximise lifespan, actually making some levels feel rewarding and completely different when played with other characters. So listen up you big software companies – we want thought and replay value packed in our games, not just something we'll play once and forget! Pete Wells

You can stop gushing now Pete, it's getting quite messy round here. *Lego*

The Big Question

Least popular 'Eve' genetic powers that were eventually rejected from *BioShock...*



- 1 'Naughty' X-ray vision: 23%
- 2 Male lactation: 13%
- 3 Close harmony singing: 8%
- 4 Shoot fire from bottom: 24%
- 5 Ability to become CEO of international petro-chemical company: 32%



STEEL VIGIL
 Name: Tony Watkins
 Civilian Identity: Electrician
 Occupation: Scrapper
 Archetype: Martial Arts
 Primary Power:

"I'll stop hitting, when you stop twitching."



SILVER TEMPEST
 Name: Penelope Larson
 Civilian Identity: Beautician
 Occupation: Defender
 Archetype: Storm Summoning
 Primary Power:

"Watch yourself, I can whip up more than just a storm."



CANDY CYANIDE
 Name: Abi Johnson
 Civilian Identity: Nursery Assistant
 Occupation: Stalker
 Archetype: Dark Melee
 Primary Power:

"I'm sweet on the outside but bitter as hell on the inside."



SGT STRIKE
 Name: Michael Frost
 Civilian Identity: Security Guard
 Occupation: Blaster
 Archetype: Assault Rifle
 Primary Power:

"Get to the frontlines soldier, this war won't win itself!"



LORD MORTIFY
 Name: Peter Jenkins
 Civilian Identity: Biology Teacher
 Occupation: Dominator
 Archetype: Mind Control
 Primary Power:

"With this new formula my dark minions shall rule Earth!"



NECROVIA
 Name: Charlotte MacDonald
 Civilian Identity: Musician
 Occupation: Mastermind
 Archetype: Necromancy
 Primary Power:

"Kneel before me mortal, accept your new fate."

US



WHAT'S YOUR **SECRET** IDENTITY?



CITY OF HEROES

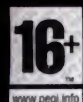
CITY OF VILLAINS

**GOOD vs. EVIL
 COMBINED EDITION**

EU.CITYOFHEROES.COM/SECRET

**TWO MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMES
 ONE SUBSCRIPTION FEE!**

Original concept by City of Heroes 'Create an Ad' competition winner: Mother's Love



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COVER STORY

BIOSHOCK

The Irrational baby's got the bends. Prepare to go deeper into the year's most mind-blowing title than you ever thought possible...



THERE ARE PLENTY of amazing games coming in 2007, but *BioShock* is at the front of the queue. From the atmospheric art direction, to the new info we've drawn from the lips of its creator Ken Levine – 'gleeful' is the perfect word. This is Rapture: an underwater self-supporting capitalist enterprise populated by the best humans. That is, until the discovery of stem cells that could enhance the body and mind sent everyone mutation-crazy. By the time you arrive, these stem cells are a rarity, the survivors are mutated beyond salvation and screaming Aggressors are after your innards. But you're still in Utopia, so you get free refills on Coke...

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PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

NIGHT GAMER

THERE'S A LOT written about gaming and addiction, and up until now I've always responded with a kneejerk reaction of screaming "Shut up! Leave me alone Trevor McDonald! Games are innocent!" whenever the mass media touches the issue. But then again, I routinely stay up to the wee small hours playing games whether it's a work day, a weekend or a public holiday. Would I do this for any other hobby?

If I was a knitter would I be telling myself: "Just one more cross-stitch Will, then you can go to bed... One more 'knit one, purl one', it'll be fine..." If I fastidiously collected dead birds and stuffed them with sand, would I be unable to tear myself away come midnight? Even with late-night TV, there comes a point where I reluctantly drag myself away, whether I'm slouched watching Sheriff John Bunnell hyperventilating about crooks getting their comeuppance from the Missouri PD, or a dead-eyed Zante holiday rep being sick and/or getting naked on yet another ITV1 docusoap.

So why is it that with games I have no 'off' switch? Perhaps it's because games are built to hook you – you can't deny that. But also, gaming at night is ace. When the clocks hit a.m. the lights are off, everyone else is asleep and there are no distractions. The immersion skyrockets, and even the most obvious of game scares can bring your heart into your mouth. Obviously this means I'll oversleep the next day and get in shit with Sefton. But them's the breaks.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

LOST IN THE POSTAL

Game, movie, easy target. Controversial developers Running With Scissors discuss *Postal III* and Uwe Boll

www.runningwithscissors.com | ETA: 2008

POSTAL HAS ALWAYS been an easy target for the media – how can a game series that thrives on muddying the water on themes like race, sexuality and cutting someone's head off and pissing on the corpse not attract the *Daily Mail's* attention? "But in our game, you're not playing a vicious street thug murdering your way up the criminal food chain," points out Steve Wik, the lead designer on *Postal III*. "You're just a guy who has to buy milk and is free to choose whether to complete that goal with violence or without. Apparently free will is evil?"

Yes, the lads at Running with Scissors are rather touchy about the media talking about their games without playing them first. "If they spent any time doing any research before they opened their mouths they might have a clue as to who we are and what we're about!" opines the game's producer Mike J. "No-one takes the time to

think that maybe we're making a comedy, and not a brutal violent game."

Fair points perhaps – and despite the obvious controversy that *Postal* subsists on, it cannot be denied that the open-ended structure of *Postal 2* put it ahead of its time. The Dude's mundane tasks could be completed by either fair means or extremely foul, and this pattern is set to return in the Source-powered *Postal III*.

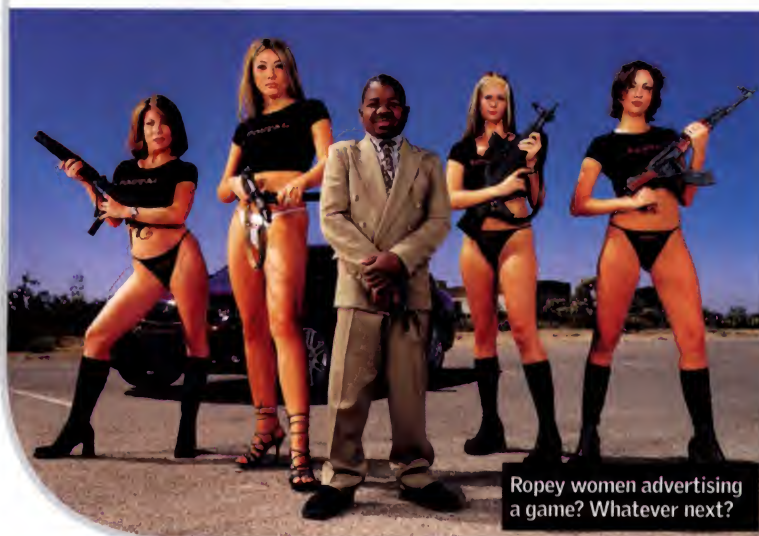
"We're doing a mix of free-roaming sandbox areas and linear story missions," says Wik, explaining that the *Postal 2* extended storyline has seen the trailer-strewn town of Paradise vaporised. "Having money will be more important, so there will be plenty of crappy jobs for The Dude to take on in his trademark manner." Vince Desi, CEO of the gang, adds: "Every time I go to the toilet I write down new ideas."

"We do have some weapons and items that are pretty insane," muses Wik. "And

PETA will probably be offended. Again." But the *Postal* juggernaut doesn't stop there – what of the Uwe Boll-directed *Postal* movie?

"It's very loosely based on *Postal 2*, and I mean loose," explains Desi. "As in the game, the lead character is known as the P-Dude, but from there it's much more a political comedy than the game ever was. The bottom line is the P-Dude tries to save the world, which sounds a lot like Hollywood to me."

But are they really fans of the abominable director of the *BloodRayne* and *Alone In The Dark* movies? "If by fan you mean, have seen and hated his movies, then yes! I have seen AND hated almost every single one of his movies! He's quite possibly the smartest or dumbest man alive," smiles Mike J. "He either knows how bad he sucks and just makes quick films for the bucks... Or he thinks he's really good. I've met him and I still have no idea..." A ringing commendation if ever we've heard one.



STOP PRESS!

Quake Wars: Advert Territory?

We've heard rumours that *Quake Wars* will follow the trend set by *Battlefield 2142* with the inclusion of in-game advertising. More when we hear it...

Brand new Relic

Company Of Heroes developers Relic have revealed that they've got both an RPG and an MMOG in the works, a significant departure for the RTS stalwarts.

ArchLord goes free

In the face of the *WOW* leviathan, it's no surprise that small-fry MMO *ArchLord* has thrown monthly payments out of the window. Desperate times etc...

36

Clive Barker's Jericho

Clive Barker invites us into the more grisly bits of his imagination. Which is pretty much all of it.



40

Left 4 Dead

Turtle Rock poke their heads out to announce a full-on evolution of the *Zombie-Strike* phenomenon...



52

Tomb Raider: Anniversary

Happy anniversary! No-one can say it hasn't been a bumpy, bouncy ride for Lara. Not without sniggering a bit.



Clouds: not as tasty as they look.



Later models had cupholders and cigarette lighters.



BE YOUR GRANDAD!

Realism is key in Oleg Maddox's *Storm Of War: The Battle Of Britain*

www.ubj.com | ETA: TBA

FLIGHT SIM GURU and all-round lovely chap Oleg Maddox recently popped into the *PC ZONE* office to give us our first taste of the true sequel to flight sim classic *IL-2: Sturmovik*.

The new game is dubbed *Storm Of War: The Battle Of Britain*, and Maddox assures us that the plans are for this title to become the basis for a whole new series of expansions. As expected, the WWII outing will see a bevy of graphical improvements, and in the code we were shown the ultra-hi-res cockpits were

already looking remarkably lifelike. Alongside the graphical improvements are a bunch of AI upgrades and clever tweaks to the damage system. For instance, flying a damaged aircraft will now be fraught with peril as high-G manoeuvres may cause further damage.

A variety of missions will be available to test your flying skills, both offline and on, where Maddox promises us a host of new, previously unseen multiplayer modes. Look out for a full feature and interview next issue, dogfighters.



The explosions are second to none.



The sci-fi of *Ground Control II* is long gone.

MASS DESTRUCTION

Prepare yourself for a *World In Conflict*

www.worldinconflict.com | ETA: Summer

IN THE DEEP, dark forests of Sweden, a tinkering noise is emanating from the offices of Massive Entertainment.

Company boss Martin Walfisz recently slipped us some details on the *Counter-Strike* meets *C&C* genre-buster, and as well as the US and USSR, they've unveiled the third faction as NATO. Word is that the single-player campaign

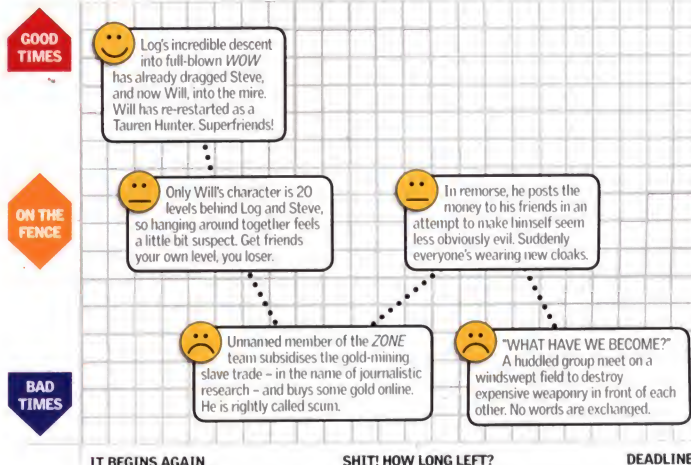
will take you halfway around the world, – all the way from suburban America, through Europe and into Mother Russia.

And while nukes will figure, Walfisz confirms that they "will not be used often or lightly" – as opposed to the mushroom clouds that will pepper the closing moments of multiplayer bouts. Hans Blix would have a field day.

STUFF

In the proud tradition of *Diablo* and *Dungeon Siege* comes *Silverfall*, a cel-shaded dungeon, forest and castle-based hack-and-slash designed to send your fingers into a clicking frenzy. Despite a subtext that looks at the subtle balance between science and nature, essentially what you'll be up to is killing trolls and goblins with a variety of spells and big swords. Not going to change the world, but it fills a hole we suppose...

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



LIGHTS, CAMERA, RE-ENACTMENT!

Forget illegal downloads, pervy mpegs and happy slapping: gaming fan videos are the new daddies of the online world...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

BAD TV IS ENOUGH to make you hurl. Truly bad TV is enough to make you hurl yourself out the window. Such was the case with a 2005 episode of wonky-camera crime show *CSI: Miami* entitled 'Urban Hellraisers', in which a bunch of students embark on a bank-robbing, hostage-taking, looting/raping crime spree. Why? Because they're re-enacting a videogame and keeping 'score' on click counters. As you do.

Daily Mail readers probably applauded heartily (before turning over to the Playboy Channel to tut-tut at all the disgraceful nudity), while gamers the world over sighed in unison. Once again, the media had got it wrong: we only turn into demented psychopaths during power cuts, and we only re-enact games in front of cameras and on the Internet. Live Action Game Re-enactments – let's call them LAGR – are growing like

triffids in a field of nuclear waste. A quick browse of the Web turns up *Street Fighter*-inspired dance-offs (YouTube – 'Chun Li and Ryu Salsa dance'); *GTA* car-chases, gun-running and glitches (Google 'Grand Theft by otherside'); and a pony-tailed Sam Fisher trying to escape from a garden shed (YouTube – 'Splinter Cell spoof'). They might run the gamut from hilarious to horrible – phone cams to high-def digitals – but these fan-flicks are far from sick snuff.

AMATEUR HOUR

Some are fab. Like the creepy corridor antics of 'Live Action F.E.A.R.' (again, easily found on YouTube), which emulates the game surprisingly well despite a non-existent budget.

"The idea to try and recreate the game in real life just came naturally," says co-creator Brian Williams. "Since *F.E.A.R.* predominantly takes place in office buildings, I thought my workplace would be a perfect place to film."

Williams and pal Tim Cleary drew up storyboard sketches and filmed at night. In order to create the illusion of an FPS, they used a Mini-DV camera strapped onto a bicycle helmet with plastic zip-ties. "Adobe Photoshop was used to create the HUD, the loading screens and some of the visual effects, and most of the sound effects came from *F.E.A.R.* itself."

Despite rival machinima and animation entries, Williams and Cleary's fan-film won Sierra's 'Show us your *F.E.A.R.*' competition, and they waltzed off with \$1,000.

Aside from hard cash, what's the motivation? Well, LAGR offers gamers a chance to dress up as their favourite characters and prance around with toy guns and swords, although some lazy sods can't even be bothered taking off their hoodies (check out YouTube – 'FFVII Spoof'). You could say that these proto-Spielbergs are closely related to the cosplay community, a global group of cross-dressers inspired by Japanese games and anime.

COSPLAY AWAY

Mariana Tarifa, a cosplay addict from Argentina, creates her own costumes for conventions and parties. "At the last convention I went to, I wore a *Silent Hill* demon nurse costume and did my best to perform the scene from the movie. I even watched the DVD 'making of' over and over again in order to learn all the cool movements."

Tarifa points out that copying character movement from games is tough because "most of them are unreal". However, some LAGR enthusiasts openly embrace game characters' wonky dynamics – and this is where online fan-flicks get funny. "Cosplay exists to show devotion to a character," explains Rocco Botte, ringleader of Mega64.com. "We exist to show how completely irrelevant these characters are to reality."

Crossing gaming with *Trigger Happy TV*, Mega64 drags surreal game situations into the real world. In 'Tetris', a cardboard L-shape tries to fit alongside everyday objects while bemused bystanders look on. 'Hitman' features un-stealthy assassination attempts in fast-food restaurants, and 'Paperboy' reunites all the game's obstacles (breakdancers, remote-controlled toys, the Grim Reaper etc) on one street. The latter is so surreal it could melt your broadband connection.





Space Invaders rendered in people. And they say that art is crap these days.

Botte contemplates the risks involved. "We were detained by the cops for our *Resident Evil 4* skit, and a guy pulled a bat on us during the *Grand Theft Auto* bit on our v2 DVD." The skits are a laugh, but they also raise a serious point – the gaming universe is so far removed from our reality, to suggest that it could influence people to commit crime is simply bonkers. "If anything, I hope Mega64 proves that games are just that – games," says Botte. "They are, by their nature, ludicrous. I think people take videogames way too seriously. They're just fun – quit trying to make them more than they are."

Games might be fun, but does Mega64 suggest a wider reach for fan vids? Can LAGR, like machinima, cross into art? *Gameover*, by Guillaume Reymond, suggests so. In 2005, this Swiss graphic designer created a breathtaking stop-motion video of *Space Invaders* (www.notsonoisy.com/gameover). Sixty-seven people acted as the pixels, re-enacting the descending aliens, mothership – even the missiles.

Reymond explains his thinking behind the project: "Today, games try to get as close as possible to reality, attempting to emulate virtual humans through sophisticated technological means. In contrast to this, I found

it exhilarating to try a reversed approach: to emulate games by using real human beings."

ENTER MAX

LAGR even promises to break the boundaries of the Internet. Writer/director Fergle Gibson is currently filming *Max Payne: Payne & Redemption* (payneandredemption.com) in Surrey, the first unofficial *Max Payne* movie, with a "£100,000 budget". Gibson promises costumes, props, locations and most importantly, the 'characteristic atmosphere' you'd expect to find in a *Max Payne* game.

"Some people like to make 'fan-films' because they admire that particular character or subject – they want to pay tribute, to be a part of the action. But then you have people like me who not only want to pay tribute to that character, but to make a positive difference in the world of cinema and show that fan-films can actually work."

Remedy, *Max Payne's* developers, have greeted news of the movie with open arms: "And it hasn't even been released yet, which must count for something," says Gibson. Other LAGR film-makers encounter equal enthusiasm.

"The games industry has somehow been able to stomach our work," grins



The graphics are just so lifelike...

Down the tube

Stick these spoofs into the search engine at youtube.com



Pac Man Invasion

A hilarious chase through a college library. Pac-Man screams in terror, while the ghost could put Pacino to shame with his inspired rendition of "waccawaccawacca".



Grand Theft Auto: Lego City

Plastic gangsters with designer stubble steal cars and shoot each other to smithereens with blunderbusses. Building a better future for games... One toy brick at a time.



Mega64: Resident Evil 4

The merchant with the pirate's voice tests his limited vocabulary on shoppers outside a mall, but no-one's buying or selling. Then the cops turn up, so he promptly legs it.



Counter Strike: The Film

Some hicks re-enact their favourite *CS* moments – with Monty Python walks, toilet-roll grenades and connection problems. Best moment comes around the 1:00 mark.

"We were detained by the cops for our *Resi Evil 4* skit and a guy pulled a bat on us during the *GTA* bit on our v2 DVD"

Rocco Botte, Mega64.com

Rocco Botte from Mega64. "We've received lots of nice write-ups from many of the publishers of the games we've parodied. Ubisoft even commissioned us to do videos for them."

"I think it's fantastic that games like *F.E.A.R.* are inspiring people to create their own videos," says Sierra's Marcus Beer. "If you look at sites like YouTube, you'll see tens of thousands of videos based around games. It goes to show that games have become as huge a part of popular culture as movies or music..."

So the next time you finish a game and feel like embarking on a murderous crime rampage, grab a camera and try acting instead. The noble law enforcers of *CSI: Miami* will appreciate it. **PCZ**



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

**PCZONE
CHARTS**

ChartTrack

- 1 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
- 2 ↑ **FIFA 07**
Issue 174 84%
- 3 ↓ **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 90%
- 4 ↓ **MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 175 91%
- 5 NEW **WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS**
Issue 176 82%
- 6 — **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
Issue 174 86%
- 7 ↓ **WARHAMMER 40K: DOW - DARK CRUSADE**
Issue 175 88%
- 8 — **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 9 — **COMPANY OF HEROES**
Issue 173 93%
- 10 ↓ **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2**
Issue 176 86%
- 11 ↓ **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 69%
- 12 ↑ **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 13 ↑ **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 14 NEW **ELDER SCROLLS IV: KNIGHTS OF THE NINE**
Issue 177 74%
- 15 ↓ **NEED FOR SPEED: CARBON**
Issue 176 78%
- 16 NEW **THE SIMS 2: FESTIVE EDITION**
Issue N/A N/A
- 17 ↓ **GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL**
Issue 176 89%
- 18 RE **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 19 NEW **AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE WARCHIEFS**
Issue 175 72%
- 20 RE **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%

**2****FIFA 07**

Is footy better than Warhammer? There's only one scientific way to find out. First, add their chart positions together...

**5****WARHAMMER:
MARK OF CHAOS**

Places five and seven for Warhammer is 12. But a two and 11 for footy is 13. One better than Warhammer!

**7****WH40K: DARK CRUSADE**

Watch out! Lower numbers are better in a chart. It's more like golf scoring than football scoring – a double-snub for football!

**11****CHAMP MANAGER 2007**

This is of course ignoring FMO7 at number three, too. But that's the beauty of science – it doesn't pretend to be perfect.

OUT ON A WING

The MMOG takes flight with NCSoft's CryEngine-powered *Aion*

www.plaync.com/us/games/aion | ETA: Q4 2007

IF YOU'RE GOING to make an MMOG, you'd better love your game-world. You're asking people to spend time and money walking around inside it, and people aren't as stupid as they look and act. The most obvious way to love your world is to make it look good, and from what we've seen so far, *Aion* looks pretty damn good.

Taking the Far Cry engine – that of pretty tropical islands – and shaping it to a universe of angels, demons and dragons, *Aion* looks stunning. NCSoft seem to understand the land-bound frustrations of *WOW*, too. Here, characters won't run up hillsides only to find their progress blocked by a too-steep-to-climb contour line. Instead, they'll climb sheer cliff faces and fly into dynamic cloud systems using angelic wings, not plodding mounts.

Aion presents a charmingly Korean take on the Christian creation myth. You'll play as The Chosen Ones or The Fallen, in a material world that inhabits the gap between darkness and light. So far, so Sunday service. But they've also added dragons – a server-controlled faction of dragons no less.

Dark Age Of Camelot brought us the realm vs realm combat that we'll be seeing again in

Warhammer Online, and *Aion* is attempting to take all this and add PvPvE. It's a system that considers all the alliances and relationships between realms and guilds, and pits everyone against the dragons. Sounds interesting, but how it'll differ from traditional MMO gameplay we look forward to finding out.

There's always a bit of apprehension as another subscription-based MMO comes along, but if *Aion* delivers on its graphical promise (it's difficult to imagine the videos translating into gameplay) and tones down the traditional Korean grind, then it could well make some serious ripples.

Aion gives you wings. Literally.



The Far Cry engine may be old, but can still do 'purdy'.



Combat is of the hardcore Korean ilk.

Leaving your treasure out like that is just asking for trouble...



IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man behind the *Sam & Max* renaissance

DAVE GROSSMAN - SENIOR DESIGNER AT TELLTALE GAMES AND HOLDER OF THE SCRUFF OF SAM AND MAX'S NECKS

Dave Grossman designs episodic games for Telltale, writes scripts for them and generally throws his weight around - as well as pitching new projects, writing other odds and ends and basically doing whatever needs doing. "Occasionally, I make coffee," he adds...

So, *Episode One* of *Sam & Max* is out of the door - is it a good feeling?

"You bet! Of course, at about the time it was going out the door I was fairly well wrapped up in episodes two, three and four, which were all in various stages of planning and production, so I hardly noticed it happening. But somebody told me it's out, and it's getting good reviews, so that's nice. It's like when your child brings home a good report card from school."

Based on feedback from *Culture Shock*, is there anything you're planning on changing in the gameplay of future episodes?

"The main thing is that we're juggling things like the level of difficulty of puzzles and how much help we give the players, to provide the best all-around experience for the whole audience. And sometimes we try stuff but it doesn't work. We changed one feature for *Episode Two* based on some things said by people in the community, but I'm not going to say what it was, because I didn't like the way it was impacting the overall feel and insisted it be changed back again. Sometimes it's my job to be the crank."

You've set yourselves quite a tight schedule in terms of regular releases - do you reckon you'll be able to stay on target?

"Yes. A number of uncontrollable catastrophes have occurred in the last six months, but we try to improvise and adapt, like the Marines. We're still more or less on the mark and expect to stay there."

What new storylines and characters will we be confronted with as new episodes are released?

"In *Episode Two*, Sam and Max get to go to a low-rent television studio, where a talk-show host has gone berserk. They meet several peculiar entertainment industry characters, and naturally, they wind up on TV."

What are your favourite snippets of dialogue from the new episodes?

"From *Episode Two* I like the following: 'monk paste,' 'upswing,' 'thrombosis,' 'rinky-dink halo' and 'loveable but essentially useless lump of fur and icky stuffing materials.' Oh wait, do you mean whole LINES of dialogue? Well, now your challenge

is to locate all five of those snippets in the game when it comes out..."

Finally, an important question: what's your favourite breakfast cereal?

"I've experimented much over my lifetime - I even used to write cereal reviews around 1990 - but I've been a diehard Cheerios eater for quite a few years now. Sometimes I even take them with me when I travel. Is that weird?"



tat Zone

"Knick knack paddy whack, give some tat a home. Now eBay is pwned by ZONE"

And you thought YOUR Christmas presents were rubbish. Not content with the barrage of socks and musky aftershaves provided by the recent Yule festival, games companies have the gall to send us game-related crap useful to neither man nor beast. Thankfully, the Internet exists to help us find those who actually want this shite. To capitalise on this, and to gain Alton Towers-style fastpasses to heaven, we sell stuff on eBay for charity under the tag PCZoners!

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 **XBOX 360™**

GAMES OF 2007

PCZONE
GAMES OF
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WHEN YOU THINK about the year 2007, exactly what comes to mind? First, you muse on the passing of another year, the unstoppable flow of time and the cold, harsh inevitability of death. But then you think about what a bonzer year it'll be for PC games! To celebrate this year being at least 175% better than last year games-wise, we've been badgering developers and publishers for fresh details on their biggest titles, and have herded everything we received into 40-plus magnificent pages of excitement. With so much new stuff on *BioShock*, *Crysis*, *UT2007*, *C&C3: Tiberium Wars*, *Oblivion - Shivering Isles* and *Quake Wars* nestling at your fingertips, we're surprised these pages haven't spontaneously combusted in your hands already. And if news about real games isn't enough, you can turn to page 44 where our own 'Mystic Will' gazes into his pretend crystal ball and tells us what the future may hold. Anyway - enough froth: read on, and enjoy...

THE HITLIST!

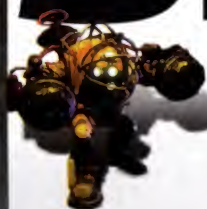
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**BEHOLD
THE FUTURE**





BIO SHOCK



A horror shooter that goes deeper and darker than anything before it – can **Jamie Sefton** take the pressure?

www.irrationalgames.com | ETA: Q2

"THERE'S NOTHING LIKE an immolated monster flailing around, screaming and setting nearby objects on fire in panic." Ken Levine, creative director of Irrational Games, loves his job. In an industry that often seems packed with cynical, ageing individuals who have lost their gaming mojo, Levine is a refreshingly enthusiastic and passionate developer. Having worked on such titles as *Thief: The Dark Project* and *System Shock 2*, the ex-Hollywood scriptwriter knows a thing or two about making a game that's fun to play, but also a darker, dare we say it, more 'mature' experience.

BioShock could be Levine's greatest game yet – a frightening shooter set in a submerged art deco utopia called Rapture, once populated by the world's great minds,

but now perverted into a diseased, deadly ecosystem where genetic mutation has spun wildly out of control.

"We wanted to build a place that said 'There's no easy escape'," begins Levine. "That's what always bothered me about a lot of shooters – the artificiality of it all. You think, 'Why can't I just run that way and get out of here? Because that car is in the way?' The sad truth is that games are a bit of a fib. I want to make games that minimise the fib."

WHOLE MISTRUTH

What we've seen of *BioShock* is no lie – the last presentation in September showed an uncompromisingly brutal FPS, where you must use every aspect of the environment, weapons and special 'Plasmid' bio-skills to negotiate the



Pistol, machine gun, burning teddy bear – the same old FPS shtick...



Another shotgun romance...



It's party time in Rapture!

nightmarish underwater city. But how are Levine and his team going to introduce the player into this horrific reality and explain the detailed back-story of Rapture's demise?

"Well, I'm not a fan of the tutorial - we're trying to avoid tutorial-itis," laughs Levine. "The dynamic training system is our version of having a buddy who's already played the game sitting with you, giving you a nudge in the right direction if you get lost. As for the story, there's about a zillion ways we tell it..."

SHOW DON'T TELL

Most obviously, *BioShock* is littered with visual clues, as no two places in Rapture promise to look the same. "We use a device called 'mise en scène': which loosely translates to 'Levine's a pretentious twit'." What it really means, if you're not a regular *Late Review* viewer, is that the developers set up visual scenes so you can, perhaps, identify what happened. For example, you might stumble upon a bedroom with the corpses of a man and woman on a bed, with a photo of a young woman between them, and several bottles of pills on the bedside table.



Won't you help me Doctor Beat?

More disturbingly, you could find an audio log of a cop who was forced to murder someone, describing the apartment of the person he killed just before you discover the eerie location, complete with a ghost-like resonance of the victim's last moments.

Levine continues: "You could even encounter desperate survivors, wheeling and dealing with you for one last chance to make it out of the city. We've got no shortage of story-telling devices."

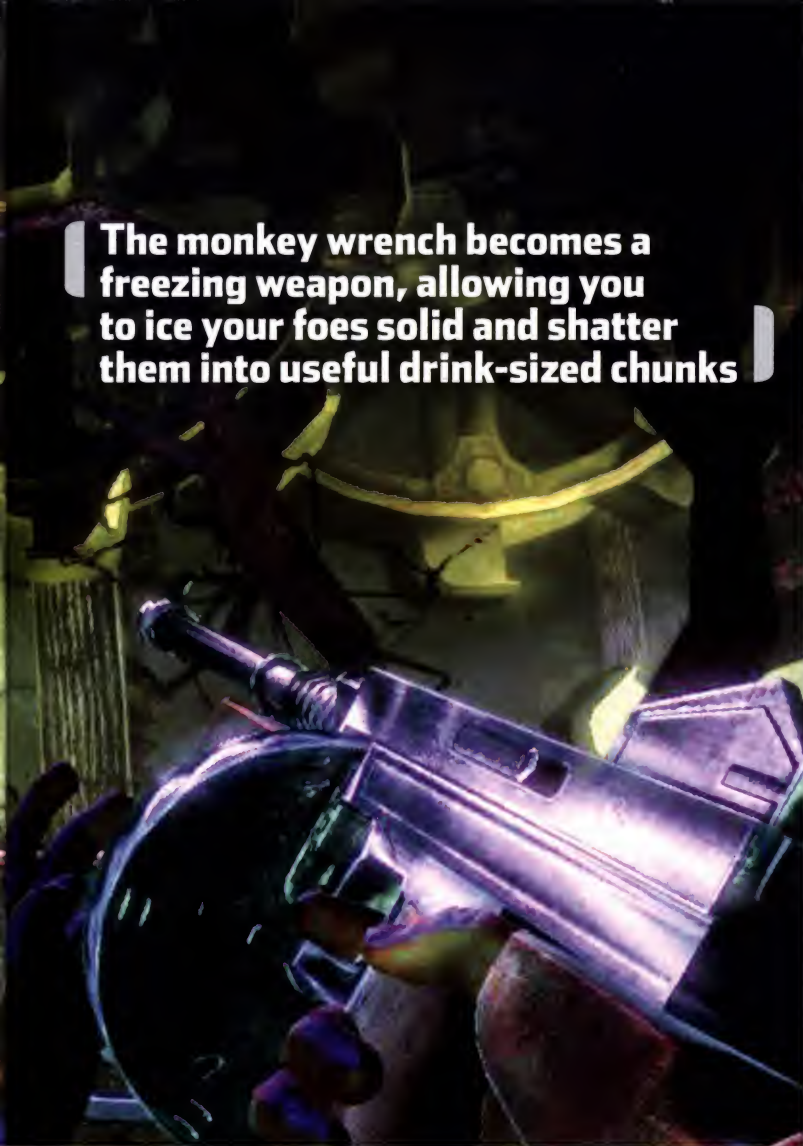
BioShock has been described as 'freeform', in the sense that the levels are fairly open and sprawling in comparison with your usual shooter. Plus, according to Levine, you can freely travel back to any area you've visited before.

"The traditional mission structure is used to prevent players from travelling to overly dangerous areas, but there might be cases where the player is like, 'This spot is too hot, I'm going back to build myself up a bit'."



That hairpiece really isn't working.

The monkey wrench becomes a freezing weapon, allowing you to ice your foes solid and shatter them into useful drink-sized chunks



This said, the game will be split into seven distinct areas (we'll call them levels, for simplicity's sake), and each will have its own themes and internal storylines beneath the vast canopy of the *BioShock* narrative arc. One, for example, is called Hephaestus (that's the Greek god of blacksmiths, technology and fire, fact fans), which deals with what fuels Rapture: extremely hot steam produced from volcanic vents that lie at the very bottom of Davy Jones' Locker.

Another, called Arcadia, is an environment that illustrates some of the practical problems of building an underwater city – it's a vast arboretum designed to provide oxygen for the city's population. Unfortunately, however, the powers that be have released something toxic into its vicinity – and it's up to you to stop the rot setting into the plant-life.

TWISTED SISTERS

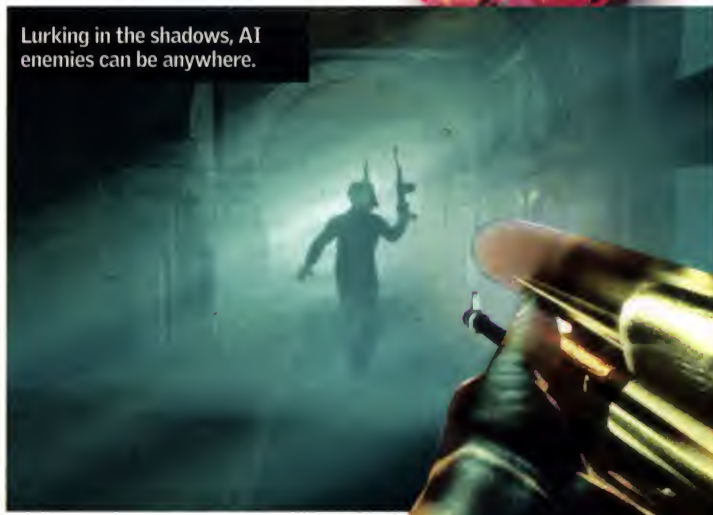
Apart from obviously trying to escape the city, your character in *BioShock* can be motivated by other people in Rapture who guide you and give you tasks to accomplish, and also by what you actually want to do in the game. The genetic currency in *BioShock* is called Adam, the substance that you have to obtain from the Little Sisters – girls who are protected by the über-powerful diving helmet-wearing maniacs, the Big Daddies (see the 'All About Adam', above). You use

Adam to buy goodies at machines to upgrade your weapons, to get healed at health points and to enhance your character with 'Eve' genetic powers.

Levine continues: "In *BioShock*, our focus is on the customisation of the Plasmid powers you have available, with a very fluid system of upgrades. The player is generally free to reconfigure himself, and how you play the game is often determined by which ones you have active at any given time."

Plasmid powers are split into two types: passive (basic power-ups you equip to enhance your performance); and active

Lurking in the shadows, AI enemies can be anywhere.



All about Adam

Dealing with *BioShock*'s deadliest foes – the Little Sisters and Big Daddy escorts...

Adam is *BioShock*'s universal currency, used for everything from upgrading to hacking. The Little Sisters who stalk Rapture are the most lucrative source of the material because they can extract the genetic material directly from dead bodies. So, to obtain Adam you're going to have to deal with the Little Sisters and their Big Daddy escorts – the hulking, diving suit-wearing aggressor that adorns our cover. How you deal with getting the Adam – whether by helping or hurting the Little Sisters – will have an impact on the game that Ken Levine isn't willing to reveal yet...

However, the Irrational boss did tell us what he loves about *BioShock*'s unconventional mascots. "My favourite thing is that when the Little Sister is threatened by gunfire, the Big Daddy lifts her up by the scruff of the neck and puts her behind him and out of danger. That's so cool; they really have this weird, creepy father-daughter protective vibe going on. Although, one thing that you haven't seen of this relationship yet is that they will actually mourn one another in the event that one of the pair passes away. It's pretty heartbreaking to watch."

"Daddy...?"



**PCZONE
GAMES OF
2007**



(weapon-like powers that have to be activated manually, about a dozen in total).

There are over 50 passive powers available, with a huge range of functions. One group, for example, focuses on ways that you can manipulate your enemies. So, the 'Security Beacon' ability allows you to turn security turrets and cameras against the monsters instead of you, while 'Berserk Rage' sends enemies into a mindless fury, attacking other creatures. Another set, when combined, makes you a better hacker, so you can open locked vaults, subvert the security system and lower prices on ammunition. Or you can perhaps lean toward powers that improve the physical characteristics of your character, giving you more health, more speed and better stealth. Levine gave us exclusive details on four of these...

ICE TO SEE YOU

First, the 'Cryo Field' power lowers your body temperature to an absurd degree, making you more resistant to cold damage. However, the real power comes from the freezing nature extending from your arm to the default wrench weapon in your hand. The result is that the simple monkey wrench becomes a freezing weapon, capable of icing your foes solid, allowing you a follow-up swing to shatter the frozen chunk into useful drink-sized chunks.

Second, with 'Chameleon Blood' there's always a place to hide. Says Levine: "Imagine you're recovering



Certain powers can turn enemies into bodyguards...

"If you strike an enemy standing in a pool, the electricity will arc to everyone else in the water – just watch the laws of physics bring the pain..."

Ken Levine, creative director, Irrational Games

from a tough fight, and looking desperately for some health. Up ahead you see a health station, but as you approach it you hear a monster about to turn the corner. With Chameleon Blood installed, whenever you stop moving, you slowly fade into invisibility. Hold your breath, don't move a muscle and the monster will simply pass by. Just hope he doesn't bump into you, because that's bound to make him suspicious..."

Third, 'Sneaky Smasher' is the power that turns you into a fully-fledged assassin. Irrational are working on the AI for the enemies in *BioShock* so that they have carefully modelled awareness of the world

around them. With the Sneaky Smasher power, it's possible to sneak up around them and deliver a surprise wrench swing to the back of the head to finish them off.

The fourth passive power that you can use to enhance your character in the game-world is inspired by those circus freaks who can eat supermarket trolleys piece-by-piece. 'Iron Gut' power allows you to eat all sorts of rubbish lying around the world such as steel screws, rubber hoses, batteries, brass tubes and shell casings, to boost your health when more conventional sources are scarce.

"It's the nature of our power system that you have room to experiment and change,"

boasts Levine. "If you decide that certain powers aren't to your liking, you can find machines that let you rearrange your power load-out. Then, every time you find a new power, you get the option of adding it to your arsenal right there and then."

ELECTRIC AVENUE

So what of the devastating active genetic powers? You know, the ones in the recently released CG promotional movie that shows the outstretched hand of your character bubbling under the skin before releasing hundreds of angry bees into the face of foes.

Well, we've already seen 'Telekinesis', a power that Levine calls the "Swiss Army knife of fun game systems". This power enables you to pick up, say, a chair and fling it at monsters, or snag a stack of bullets from an otherwise unreachable ledge. It can also enable you to hold a barrel in mid-air to deflect enemy fire, or even grab grenades thrown by foes and chuck them back in their stupid, deformed faces. It's basically *Half-Life 2*'s gravity gun, minus the gun.

We began this piece with a comment from Ken Levine describing his joy at setting a creature on fire, and 'Incineration' is the power that every closet pyromaniac longs for. Fire spreads dynamically in the game, so you can actually combine powers to, for example, set a teddy bear on fire then throw it at enemies with the use of telekinesis. Occasionally, you'll even

The strawberry jam gun is another innovation.



find rotting wooden walls that can be burned down to reveal hidden areas.

Another bonus of being surrounded by the empty ocean depths is the fact that you'll come across many and varied puddles of water, each of which can be used as a weapon should you tool yourself up with the necessary electrical knowhow.

"With 'Electric Bolt' you can fire a burst of crackling electric energy so that your enemies will take damage of the 'I-put-a-fork-in-a-socket' variety and also become stunned, giving you a chance to safely deliver a coup de grâce," explains Levine.

"Better still, if you zap some mechanical targets like turrets or security bots, they'll become inactive long enough for you to hack them and get them on your side. Yet the coolest feature of Electric Bolt is definitely its interaction with water. If you strike an enemy standing in a pool, the electricity will arc to everyone else in the water – just watch the laws of physics bring the pain!"

CREATURE DISCOMFORTS

It's a considerable relief that Irrational are providing you with multiple genetic powers, as well as standard weaponry, as the city of Rapture is a dynamic, ever-changing place with a huge number of areas and terrifying inhabitants. "You're not going to be frustrated by tiny-levelitis in *BioShock*," promises Levine. "We're playing with the

numbers right now, and there's probably around 30 or 40 creatures per area, but it's quite unpredictable. Remember, the AI creatures aren't just sitting in closets waiting to be set into motion. The Big Daddies are escorting the Little Sisters, who are searching for dead bodies from which to harvest Adam, for example."

Mutated civilians in Rapture can all be different from each other, with the ability to mix and match hats, helmets, glasses, masks (to hide their hideous appearance) and other attachments to make them unique. The AI enemies can also use health machines themselves, so don't be surprised to see a creature run off for some medicine in the middle of a firefight. Rapture's population also have so-called 'homes' or areas that they guard or scavenge for items.

"For instance, there's an area in Arcadia with a bunch of bee hives where one of our Splicer monsters is looking for honey," continues Levine. "He has a routine of going from hive to hive, searching for pools of honey and scooping up handfuls of the stuff if he finds it. Not exactly monsters hanging out in monster closets..."

We've still yet to enjoy a hands-on with *BioShock*, but after witnessing several presentations, we're convinced Irrational's latest could be the *Deus Ex/System Shock 2* for this generation of gamers. Ken Levine wants to "redefine the shooter experience," and he's doing that by giving you the



Electric pipes – very hurty.

Ask Ken!

A quick Q&A with Irrational's main man, Ken Levine



Ken Levine: cornered in Boston.

Do we ever get to see what's inside the Big Daddy's diving helmet?
"Good question!"

Have you licensed *Under The Sea* by the crab out of *The Little Mermaid* to play during *BioShock*'s introductory sequences?
"Erm, no. But we have got tons of licensed period music in the game. We'll be releasing a list soon."

What's the player's ultimate role in the undersea world of Rapture?
"You keep asking me questions like this. I'm going to have to start quoting obscure French philosophers."

Is there one ultimate villain in *BioShock* or is it more subtle than that? If so, how?
"Well, all I can say is that Rapture's a complicated and deeply screwed-up place. Life's full of surprises..."

Will the HUD in the PC version differ at all from the one being developed for the Xbox 360 game?
"The HUD will keep evolving as long as time allows. We're currently getting it in front of as many fresh testers as possible, dragging people in from the street to get their feedback. It's embarrassing. We're desperate. What are you doing later?"

freedom to play the game how you want – using the best bits of role-playing games, but wrapping it up in an action blaster that will hopefully scare the bejeezus out of you.

When I ask Ken about whether he can still deliver a frightening FPS beyond the typical *F.E.A.R.*-style shocks, he nods his head sagely and grins. "The scariest parts in *BioShock* are the quiet moments, when you're all alone in a deserted corridor, with some 1940s love song playing in the distance. And then you hear the sounds of a Splicer talking to his long-dead child, telling them to get ready for school and wash their hands because they don't want them to miss their bus..." **PCZ**



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

Jamie Sefton enters deep discussion with *UT*'s ever shaggy-haired and ever-smiling producer *Jeff Morris* to find out why Epic think *UT2007* will lead this year's shooter bonanza...

www.unrealtournament2007.com | ETA: TBA



Q So the thinking is that this rendition is going to be the ultimate *UT* for fans?

A "We think so! The fans of *Unreal Tournament* are a diverse group, whether they're hardcore deathmatch veterans who've played every version of *UT*, or more recent fans lured by the vehicular carnage of *Onslaught*. *UT2007* pushes what people love about the franchise."

In multiplayer, which weapon is most fun?
"For me, it's all about the Necris Darkwalker's primary fire. There's such a kinetic 'oomph' to it – carving this lethal beam through enemies and vehicles alike..."

And for people playing on their tod, how have you tinkered with the bot AI?

"We started with the excellent AI of *UT2004* and have been layering on features that make these bots feel like human opponents. A great example of that is they miss like humans now (shooting where you *would* have been), rather than internally calculating 'miss' and then firing in a random direction."

Can you tell us any more about how the changing terrain affects the new Warfare mode?

"We're still experimenting and tweaking various ideas, so I don't want to go into

"The Necris vehicle team is so different from anything else out there, so it's a real rush to take these death-machines into battle"


Jeff Morris, producer, *UT2007*

much detail. Maps controlled by the Necris definitely have their own ecosystem."

Can you assure PC fans that *UT2007* won't be dumbed down for console?

"It won't be dumbed down in any way, shape or form. Console players crave the same fast-paced action that *UT* specialises in."

So for you, what's the single, solitary most exciting thing about the new *Unreal Tournament*?

"I'd have to say the new vehicles. The Necris vehicle team is just so different from anything else out there, so it's a real rush to take these death-machines to battle." 

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Did *Jamie Sefton* jump, or was he pushed? You decide... www.ea.com/moh/airborne | ETA: Q2

LAST SUMMER, PC ZONE was days away from doing an exclusive reveal of the new *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*, when suddenly, the studio trip was cancelled and all coverage postponed. A few months later, the fog of war lifted and we discovered why – EA had decided to delay *Airborne* so they could shift the game over to Epic's Unreal Engine 3 and take advantage of its stunning next-gen rendering technology.

The result is a huge jump in detail on character models, a larger draw distance and more explodey whizz-bangs (stop me if I'm getting too technical). However, it's been a long time since *Allied Assault* and the glory days of *Medal Of Honor*, so can the latest episode successfully claw back some ground from WWII shooter invaders such as *Call Of Duty*?

Well, the focus of *Airborne* is on five historic operations, including Market Garden, the botched Allied offensive into Holland featured in the famous Richard Attenborough movie *A Bridge Too Far*. You play each of the two major missions in every campaign as two characters: first as pathfinder Eddie La Pointe, to set up communications in what will be mainly stealth missions; and second, as Private Travers, jumping into the action alongside hundreds of fellow allied soldiers.

However, what's really different from previous *MOH* games is that the parachute descent is completely controlled by you –

if you happen to choose your drop zone on top of a high building, that's where you'll begin the mission. You can also cock-up the landing, which could mean a serious loss of health, leaving you vulnerable to attack as you desperately untangle your 'chute.

OPEN BATTLE

This non-linearity is a major departure for the franchise, and the development team has had to completely re-write the AI for both allied and enemy soldiers to help them take advantage of the terrain and changing dynamics of the missions in real-time. Levels are blimmin' huge, with three entrances and exits to almost every location, multiple pathways and the ability to complete mission objectives in whatever order takes your fancy. Hmmm, take out

Your descent can be controlled *Crysis*-style.



The series takes another dive.



the sniper's nest with a gib-splattering grenade or maybe viciously garrotte the lookout? Ooh, choices, choices...

Another new feature for *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* is the ability to upgrade your weapon depending on your proficiency rating in the game and whether you pick up the supply bundle left by an air-drop, local resistance or stabbed Nazi. Based on actual field modifications used during WWII, the mods can include increasing the rounds carried by a machine-gun, or reducing the recoil in a sniper rifle. You'll also be able to increase your shooting accuracy through what EA are calling 'True Trigger', a targeting skill that when mastered, makes taking out any Swastika-bearing fascists a breeze. *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* – officially one to watch on the radar. **ETA**

Weapon upgrades are based on actual field modifications used during WWII

Now with volumetric five o'clock shadows!



Those Nazis knew how to put on a light show.



Stealth plays a big part in *Airborne*.



BIA: HELL'S HIGHWAY

www.hellshighwaygame.com | ETA: Q2

GEARBOX ARE LOOKING to draw in new customers with the third instalment of their squad-based tactical shooter.

As well as the average mission being at least four times bigger, the scope of the battle is expanding too, with more enemies and allies than ever before. Things also look set to heat up in the midst of battle, with the addition of a bazooka/machine-gun/mortar crew, a whole range of destructible cover, the option to go prone and, at long last, the ability to jump over fences. You'll also be able to fight campaign maps alongside a friend – or maybe even your actual brother.



Red Hartsock: catwalk career now over.

ROGUE WARRIOR

www.zombie.com/rogue.htm | ETA: Q3

NORTH KOREA MIGHT not be the most fun place to be stuck, but *Rogue Warrior's* multiplayer options look like a blast.

The new tactical FPS from Zombie is all about fighting as a team, so it makes sense that there would be a big focus on co-op play. As you're playing through the campaign, up to three of your mates can join in and drop out at will, with the AI replacing them again as they go. Play any of the 10 multiplayer modes and you'll also get to use the unique map system made up of three different tiles; one picked by your team, one by the computer and one by your opponents, which are then seamlessly blended into one. Who said democracy's dead in North Korea?



If this looked any more like Log, we'd sue.

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

www.ghostrecon.com | ETA: Q1

ANNOUNCED FOR XBOX 360 and as likely to be PC-bound as a Windows service pack, the sequel to last year's Tom Clancy shooter sees the *Ghost* team wrapped in a border-hopping plot spanning Mexico and the good old US and A.

Along with a new character class system and medic character, there's also rumbling in the technology department. The Crosscom 2.0 system allows you to look through your airborne drone's robotic eyes in first-person,



Undoubtedly coming to a PC near you.

as well as introducing a new land drone that can dish out ammo and provide cover. Tomorrow's war looks like bundles of fun.

ARMED ASSAULT

Silly levels of realism expected in the unofficial follow-up to *Op Flashpoint*

www.armedassault.com | ETA: Q1

WITH ITS NEW war-torn island of Sahrani being four times larger than the ones we shot up in *Operation Flashpoint*, and a level of realism extending to the shape of the leaves on the trees, it's immediately apparent that Bohemia Interactive are dead-set on making *Armed Assault* bigger and better than their ageing masterpiece. Huge-scale, realism-driven battles will play out over the divided island as you're forced to fight alongside the southern democratic forces when the communist north invades.

The island isn't just a lump of green stuff either, with many more objects, landmarks and terrain features as well as much larger towns and cities. And it's not just the man-made objects that play a major part – Bohemia have been hard at work integrating ambient life. Expect to see butterflies flitting through the air, flies being attracted to dead bodies and sheep that will herd together, running away when startled. And from what we know about the clever-clever AI, if you're the one to startle them, that's probably going to be a dead giveaway to any foes in the vicinity...

Perhaps one of the most controversial new features is the ability to switch characters in the midst of battle. Will it add a whole new facet to the gameplay, or will it simply kill those illusions of believability? We'll have final code in the coming months, so we'll be able to answer these questions very soon.



Armed Assault: now with 'looking up'™ technology!



Dinghies: less cool than tanks.



Dear Will,

I still have my reservations about *STALKER*. From what I've seen, everything still looks pretty but I'm not convinced that it won't just be *another shooter*, only this time with an interesting setting. The game's been in development for five years and with features being dropped left, right and centre, will the game that's released be in any way similar to the one we were cooing at a couple of years back?

Suzy Wallace

Dear Suze,

I know that a fair bit of the survival stuff has been removed, but to be honest there's so much eating, bandaging, vodka-swilling and ammo-preservation going on, it won't be missed. *STALKER* feels like an RPG – albeit one with a very strong emphasis on shooting and not much chat – but you honestly feel as if you're fighting in a hostile environment. The inventory and bartering system is also ripped straight out of *Fallout* – which made me happy. Will Porter

Dear Will,

Anything that takes inspiration from *Fallout* is going in the right direction, but *STALKER*'s main selling point was its freeform nature and that's something I'm still not convinced about. Segments that I played last month were pretty scripted, but even in-between them, surely there's a danger of you feeling like you're trudging through miles and miles of uneventful wilderness just to get to a point where something interesting happens? SW

Dear Suze,

It doesn't feel like mindless trudging, because you've always got a PDA full of stuff (scripted and randomly created). The game works out so that the stuff you can do is usually just in the next valley or the next load zone. WP

Dear Will,

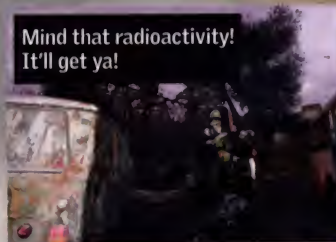
Did I just hear you right? Load zones? *Oblivion* has nailed free-roaming and the lack of loading zones hasn't it? How the hell do load zones fit into the free-roaming ethic? SW

Dear Suze,

Yeah. So you are kind of funnelled through load zones, and that also means that each zone has a fair number of unscalable hills and irradiated zones you can't pass through without being affected by death... So it isn't a complete 'right to roam' affair. But there's nothing to stop you from going anywhere or doing anything you want. I'm officially back on the *STALKER* bandwagon – it's great up here. Join me Suze! Join! WP

Dear Will

I can't make it – a radioactive bush is in my way. For now, I'll remain perched on this (hopefully unirradiated) fence. SW



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

Unmitigated disaster or free-roaming delight? Will Porter warms to the irradiated wastes...

www.stalker-game.com | ETA: March (definitely March)

I'M LOW ON health, I'm bleeding, I'm extraordinarily low on ammo and I've got a pack of mutant dogs hot on my heels. The only bright side to my situation is that I'm not far from a large Stalker camp. Turning a corner in much the same fashion as a radioactive Frank Spencer, it's only with a fair degree of self-restraint that I'm not panting, "Dogs! Being chased by dogs!" at my monitor, as the assembled gruff men at the checkpoint ready their weapons, cry havoc and let rip at the dogs of war.

Ten minutes later and I've given a barman some military plans I'd stolen, agreed to find a man's lost sniper rifle (which I'm going to keep myself), munched on some salami and had a poke around an arena that, if I was so inclined, I could fight in for cash. Feeling a little cheeky though, I toss a grenade at the feet of a nearby guard – soon klaxons are blaring and the

tannoy is full of alerts to a murderous intruder's presence. I die a horrible death.

Defying the weight of worldwide expectation, *STALKER* is not only coming out soon ("March. By hell or high water," says camp THQ), but in its current form, its gameplay really feels quite solid – another *Boiling Point* this is not. Kill someone and the game changes around them; complete a scripted mission, then watch the AI take over. It's a hugely interesting game to play.

Later on, I walk over the crest of a hill and come across the corpses of ten dead dogs piled in a heap. After a moment of "WTF?", I turn around to see a mutant warthog dragging another hunt trophy to his stash – the corpse of a rival Stalker – and several other sets of piggy eyes staring at me. When was the last time that happened in *Generic Corridor Shooter X*? Never, I tell ye. Never! The message is: it's OK to get excited about *STALKER* again.



DEVELOPER Q&A

Clive Barker's Jericho

www.codemasters.com/jericho/ | ETA: September

JOE FALKE IS the lead designer on *Clive Barker's Jericho*, the game in which seven psychically-gifted super-soldiers shoot ripped-in-half medieval children, climb up gigantic creatures formed out of human corpses and get eviscerated by flying harpies who then use their flesh to pad out their wingspan. In short – Joe's day job is a just a little on the grim side...

So what's Clive Barker's involvement? How close is he to the dev team?

"Clive and his team, Alchemic Productions, supplied us with the story, dialogue, concepts and initial design for *Jericho*... He's been with us from the start and his involvement is still ongoing and key to the project."

So what's up with Al-Khali? Why does it keep appearing and disappearing?

"The city of Al-Khali, or in modern times, the ruins of Al-Khali, is always present. During key moments of conflict or strife, a giant sandstorm envelops Al-Khali and everyone in it. Each time the growing storm appears, a team of spiritual warriors has entered the storm, banishing it, but never returning..."

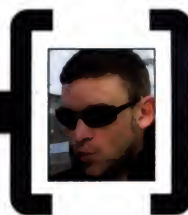
So they stay behind, and bad things happen to them?

"Each time the storm has appeared and

been banished, a different version of Al-Khali has been taken into another dimension. When the Jericho Squad enters this storm, they're entering into this dimension comprised of all the different versions of Al-Khali from times past. All those who were in the city at the time are trapped in a state of undeath, warring and fighting for power over their dominions."

Charming. So what eras do the people trapped there come from?

"Previous Jericho Squads include Sumerian priests, Roman centurions, Knights Templar and British commandos. Some have succumbed to 'the Box' and become servants of the evil force that rules there. Others have held out, attempting to aid the next generation of warriors who must save their world. All have been altered by the experience."



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Jericho: not pleasant.



Extra points for finding an undead 'tickle spot'.

What do the supernatural talents of the Jericho Squad themselves bring to the game?

"Varied, exciting and original gameplay. In *Jericho*, you'll be bending bullets around corners, clearing landslides with telekinesis and toasting enemies with a flame spirit, using the Squad's basic powers. Later in the game, the player will be able to combine the basic powers of two Squad members at a time using a technique called threading."

What's the sickest thing that you've put into the game so far?

"The game is basically the *Argos Catalogue*

of foul. It depends on what sir requires to sate his desire for the disgusting. How does a child who's been ripped in half and attacks you with its entrails sound? A suicide bomber who puts the explosive inside his body? How about a woman who makes her furniture out of human flesh? A man who's been nailed to a cross, every joint in his body fused to that so that he suffers for eternity? How about a guy who's flayed the skin on his back into wings and dug the flesh out around his eye sockets so he can better see his prey? Take your pick. Sick bags sold separately."



GOW: a PC dead-cert.



Hopefully co-op mode will stay intact.



The Locust Horde have little resemblance to actual locusts.

GEARS OF WAR

Jamie Sefton reckons Gears won't be sticking (to 360). ROFL gearsofwar.com | ETA: 2007

WHEN WE VISITED Epic for a *UT2007* cover-exclusive back in the July 2005 issue of *PC ZONE*, we got the scoop on a new game they were busy developing that also used Unreal Engine 3. *Gears Of War* was already looking absolutely stunning, with an early in-game movie showing us huge and beautiful open levels, along with incredibly detailed character models. Now released on Xbox 360, *Gears Of War* is a visceral triumph – a brutal squad-based third-person shooter, with some of the most eye-melting visuals ever seen.

As soldier Marcus Fenix, you have to take on the alien Locust Horde on the war-torn planet of Sera. You do this using weapons such as the Hammer of Dawn, which orders a satellite-based mega-laser to take out larger foes, or the Lancer Assault Rifle, which can chainsaw through Horde scum in a blur of blood.

Although still officially unconfirmed for PC (so Microsoft can shift more Xbox 360s), a Vista-compatible *Gears* will undoubtedly be out this year, and should be worth buying for the co-op Campaign mode alone...





CRYSIS

Steve Hogarty gets the latest on Crytek's ice-cold island stunner

www.crysis-game.com | ETA: Q2

HAVING ALREADY RAMMED our faces into the ample, jungle bosom of *Crysis* and shaken our heads from side to side like a wet dog, we decided to rendezvous with Crytek once again to find out what they've been up to since our paths last crossed. Recent months have been spent getting multiplayer just right, claims Jack Mamais, producer of *Crysis*, not to mention endlessly replaying the single-player 'action bubbles' to refine the minute-to-minute gameplay.

"You can use the nanosuit and weapons modifications to change your play style as you face different tactical situations," he explains. "If the objective is to infiltrate and clear a village, you can use the cloaking system and the binoculars to carefully mark all of the enemies on your radar. Then you can use a silenced weapon or melee attacks to take out the guards silently. If you find yourself caught between two huts, you can use your suit's strength ability to quickly jump onto a roof to fire a couple of

shots from above. Then you can punch a hole in the roof and drop inside to get behind cover again. If the enemy has all exits under fire, punch out a wall and use the speed ability to get to a new position. Or change to incendiary ammo, take off the silencer, dial up your suit's armour ability and face them off."

ONE TANK PLEASE

Moving seamlessly from punching walls to the new multiplayer mode 'Power Struggle', Mamais continues.

"The buy system makes vehicles and advanced weapons really valuable for the individual player and his team," he claims. "It rewards teamwork and tactical decisions – you can earn prestige points by helping your buddies capture and defend factories or by sharing vehicles. Depending on your play style, you can have anything between a quick infantry skirmish and a vehicle battle lasting hours. It's also designed to offer objective-based gameplay which

makes it feel almost like a single-player game with lots of very intense enemies."

As for Mamais' preferred method of play? "Lately, the first things I buy in multiplayer are a submachine gun with a silencer plus a sniper scope," he confides. "As for the nanosuit, I switch between speed for quick dashes to get close, and strength for a high jump and a melee attack from above – pure ownage."

Also rumoured is a sequence inspired by a scene from *Jurassic Park: The Lost World*, in which raptors stalk their prey through a field of long grass, effectively invisible save for the telltale movements of the grass around them. It doesn't take much imagination to picture this recreated in *Crysis* using the game's excellent foliage, with the obvious insertion of aliens rather than velociraptors.

Now all we need is a cocky hunter who gets his comeuppance in the form of vicious death at the tendrils of an alien, and we've got an instant classic on our hands. **A+**

A character in a yellow and black nanosuit is shown from the back, firing a weapon that emits a bright orange and yellow flame. The character is in a jungle environment with palm trees and a blue sky. The nanosuit has a complex, segmented design with yellow and black patterns. The background is a lush tropical jungle with tall palm trees and dense foliage. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

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"You can use your nanosuit's strength ability to jump onto a roof to fire a couple of shots. Then punch a hole in the roof and drop inside..."

Jack Mamais, producer, Crytek

"You wait for your opportunity and pounce, pinning your victim to the ground and begin to shred them..."

Michael Booth, creator, *Left 4 Dead*

LEFT 4 DEAD

As the Infected swarm around him, *Will Porter* brandishes the TCP and screams menacingly...

turtlerockstudios.com/l4d | ETA: Q2



JUST HOW LONG have we been waiting for this? A four-player co-operative shooter in a city overrun by zombies – a concept so obviously wonderful (and wonderfully obvious) that it could have been plucked from the halls of the very gods.

The initial release of *Left 4 Dead* will consist of four large campaigns (each spanning five or so maps) which will cover a mile's worth of streets, tunnels, decaying buildings and general urban claustrophobic spaces – all devoid of human life but packed with the Infected. The general rules of play are simple: don't get your noggin nibbled and do your best to escape.

"In one campaign, the Survivors have holed up on the rooftop of an apartment building," explains the game's creator Michael Booth when further details are demanded. "Their food and water supplies have run out, but they've seen a military helicopter making occasional visits to the helipad on the roof of the hospital across the city. They decide to run the gauntlet to the rooftop helipad in the hope of radioing the helicopter and escaping." In between them and the hospital, however, lie 'fast'

zombies of the *28 Days Later* ilk, boss creatures who can lob cars and puke zombie attractant juice on your team members and not very much ammo at all.

"The overall objective of 'survive and escape' works well because the moment-to-moment experience is very fluid and intense," continues Booth. "Working as a team, rescuing friends from various dangers that flare up, fighting the hordes as well as Infected bosses, finding your way through the sprawling landscape – all of which occurs in unpredictable areas and at unpredictable times. It should all keep players on their toes."

ONE SMART ZOMBIE

Left 4 Dead originally sprouted from (Valve chums) Turtle Rock's work on *Counter-Strike* bots in *Condition Zero*. The quality of the bots they created utterly eclipsed that of the finished game, and AI remains at the forefront of their infected plans.

"When you say, 'Our zombies have excellent AI', it sounds a bit odd since most people equate AI with doing clever behaviours and being smart," continues Booth. "However, it also includes things that people take for

granted such as knowing how to walk, run, crawl, jump or climb from point A to point B, which can be very complicated. A horde of Infected becomes much less intimidating if they all get stuck on a car in the street..."

And so, coupled with a few nodules of cleverness that let the AI talk to the engine's animation, and ragdolling functions to give zombie horde deaths a mite of the old 'spectacular', your foes will be able to go everywhere you can – and do it worryingly quickly. Or, as Booth indicates: "Whatever an enraged person might do in a similar situation to get to the target of their rage."

HUNTER AND HUNTED

But of course, the zombie plague isn't just made up of undead businessmen and tramps – the Infected come in far more fearsome guises than this. The Hunter, for example, boasts remarkable speed and the ability to leap massive distances – even up walls. The Smoker, meanwhile, has a long tongue capable of plucking a member of your squad right off their feet and out of

the sanctuary of the group.

Surviving in a zombie-infested town means covering each other's backs and moving in formation, but with creatures like this around it's not going to be easy.

Luckily, there's a way to escape the anxiety of being stalked. If you fancy running around like you're about to miss your bus and are pretty angry about it, you can play the game as a zombie instead. Or, indeed, one of his more powerful counterparts.

"It's thrilling to perch on top of a 15-storey office building as a Hunter and peer down at the Survivors fighting for their lives," explains Booth. "You wait for your opportunity and then pounce, pinning your victim to the ground and begin to shred them, causing immediate panic among the Survivor team."

With co-op gaming fast emerging as the number one trend this year (see also *Kane & Lynch*, *MOH: Airborne* and *Gears Of War*) *Left 4 Dead* is the clear leader of the slaving pack. More co-operative zombies in games please. **PC**

"Does your gun smell funny?
My gun smells funny."



Look where you're going love.
Bloody women Survivors...



One way to stop a puppy
following you home.



HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE TWO

Running free in the great outdoors

ep2.half-life2.com | ETA: Summer

HAVE WE HAD too much of City 17? Well, probably yes, to be honest. Which is why the next instalment of *Half-Life 2* sees us heading north with a vortigaunt sidekick (who can leap over the bonnet *Starsky and Hutch*-style) and a pack of Combine hunters hot on our trail.

With some truly stunning explosions, updated AI and wider vistas than ever before seen in the *HL* universe, there's much to be excited about. But will that familiar *HL2* setup feel stale in the face of *Crysis* and 2007's new breed of shooters? Probably not, but time will tell.

Where's a tribe of ewoks
when you need them?



TEAM FORTRESS 2

"Ah, but do you have a flag?"

ep2.half-life2.com | ETA: Summer

PART OF THE HL2: Episode Two triple bundle, this follow-up to one of the all-time classic multiplayer mods is looking downright gorgeous. We suspect it's also the reason for the delay in the package, as it's the one that seemed furthest off when we dropped in on Valve last year.

Of course, a staggered release would be fine by us, but we suspect Valve are making a real effort to woo console gamers with the complete *Ep Two* bundle. So no, we can't have it first, and yes, that is making us chafe in all sorts of places.

There's a refreshing
sense of whimsy in *TF2*.



PORTAL

"Let's see what's through the round window..."

ep2.half-life2.com | ETA: Summer

SO YOU WANT another reason to be excited about *Portal*, the beautifully conceived puzzle game that's bundled with *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*? Jeez, you're demanding.

Well, not all of the portal gun test chambers are entirely finished, or indeed safe. The military have left weaponry in a few, for example, while another area has had the decorators in. So, if you tire of solving portal puzzles you can have a poke around and find a missing piece of wall, behind which are the builders' stepladders and unwashed coffee mugs. Now that, my friend, is cool.

Ingenious puzzles, humour and
hidden goodies. We can't wait.



ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS



Steve Hogarty keeps his enemies close, and their territories closer

www.quakewars.com | ETA: When it's done

THERE'S AN ARCTIC island just off the coast of Norway, currently being hollowed out to create a massive underground vault capable of surviving any global catastrophe – be that intercontinental nuclear warfare, or just a really big rock falling from the sky.

Inside of this icy tomb, a collaboration of countries from around the world will place the seeds of all known varieties of every crop on the planet, like a modern-day Noah's Ark (albeit with a botanic twist), in an effort to preserve them should everything else perish in the flames of radioactive hell.

SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

It was a project no doubt designed by a committee who just wanted to do something really, really cool with a lot of spare cash the Norwegian government had

lying around – but it's a real-life project which inspired one of *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*' maps, aptly entitled Ark.

I say maps, but it's unfair to call them that – from mission to mission, you'll be doing more than just capturing control points on differing landscapes. Instead, it's all to do with asymmetry, a word which Splash Damage would fellate if such a gesture were possible.

The inevitable contender, and a comparison which the game will never shake off – *Battlefield 2142* – sees two equal and opposing forces carrying out equal objectives on implicitly symmetrical battlegrounds. *Quake Wars*, meanwhile, has two clearly different armies, Strogg and GDF, with starkly different abilities and completely opposing objectives.



Mechs are exclusive to the Strogg's arsenal.





We support the Earthlings.
But then, we're biased...

In Ark, this seed-vault has been repurposed to study Strogg technology, and after an attempt to blow it up from orbit revealed that the true research was being conducted underground, the alien invaders are forced to destroy it from the inside. The whole thing also looks a bit like Center Parcs, or perhaps the Eden Project – apart from the smouldering hole in one side. In fact, Splash Damage found it difficult to come up with scenarios in

which the Strogg have to attack rather than defend, primarily because of the Strogg's orbiting death rays making it a bit of a pushover for them, storywise at least.

Ark is divided into territories, each of which are initially controlled by the GDF with the exception of the Strogg's heavily fortified base. The Strogg must capture a nearby village and plant plasma bombs on the GDF jamming tower. Then, with the skies nicely cleared of jam, the



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Once inside the dome, the on-foot combat shines.

Strogg call in a giant mining laser which blows the doors off Center Parcs – then they all rush in and have a massive scrap inside. All the while, the game's dynamic mission system is in action. Medics accept missions to heal, while Constructors accept missions to build turrets, in turn gaining experience and rising in rank. Increased experience allows you to use various new techniques, such as akimbo weapons – but such

bonuses disappear after the game's three-round campaign ends.

Sidling up alongside *UT2007* in the list of next year's hits, one thing is becoming increasingly clear: such a clash of online titans hasn't been seen since *Quake III* and the original *Unreal Tournament*. Right now, whether or not *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* comes out on top is far too close a call to make. Either way, 2007 will be a pivotal year in online shootery. **PCZ**

Such a clash of online titans hasn't been seen since *Quake III* and the original *UT*



WARNING!
BLATANT GAME
SPECULATION!

WHAT DREAMS MAY COME...

Born with the ability to fathom the murky currents of gaming future, '*Mystic*' Will Porter unveils the PC games of tomorrow using the terrifying gift that is his curse...

1 NEW FREEDOM FORCE ACTIONER

On a previous trip to Irrational Games' Boston office, a loose-lipped developer mentioned they were hard at work on a new game in a "much loved franchise" that previously had "a crappy interface." Now, it's a bit of a stretch for my powers, but I reckon they might be talking about a new, far more action-orientated, freeform jaunt for the *Freedom Force* boys and girls. Remember, *BioShock* is by and large being created by the Australian branch of Irrational, leaving the Boston office (where the two previous *FF* games were built) open for *Freedom*-related business. The *Freedom Force* are a cherished commodity for Irrational – I predict they'll get a return.



A loose-lipped developer mentioned work on a new game in a "much loved franchise"

2 FALLOUT 3

We already know the following: *Fallout 3* is being created by a team largely composed of the gang who made *Oblivion*, and we also know they'll be using an upgraded version of the same engine. Importantly, we also know that Bethesda are aiming for a 'Mature' rating in the US – suggesting an acceptable gore level – and the E3 poster presence of the cheeky *Fallout* boy hints that the right humour is still in place. Most intriguingly, word has also slipped out that action will take place on the irradiated east coast of the States rather than the west of *Fallout 1 & 2* – so no Vault 13? We'll have to wait and see, but I bet my bottom dollar, and my top one too, that seeing as Bethesda are based just outside Baltimore, a few locations from their home town will make an appearance. And who knows, maybe even a battered and bruised Washington DC.



3 RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN 2

We know that Raven's *Quake 4* and *Soldier Of Fortune* Software are holding the reins to the next *Wolfenstein* game, and you can expect details to surface on it this year – even if the game itself will probably be a way off. Now, id have already announced that their latest nazi/zombie/horror outing will be a relatively free-roaming affair, and that it'll be an Xbox 360 lead, but there's still plenty to be excited about for PC bods. I further predict that it will use an even more tweaked version of the mega-textured *Doom 3* engine that's running *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*. And incidentally, once *Splash Damage* are finished with *Quake Wars*, maybe they too will be headed back to the *Wolfenstein* universe to make another multiplayer spin-off.



doling out spiritual advice; you'll get some neat new tricks from the Trials of the Ancients that weren't covered previously; Deathwalk will be less cheesy; and the action will take place somewhere in orbit to allow more funny upside-down walking – if not specifically on a new Dyson Sphere.

5 WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR SEQUEL

With the success of *DOW* and its many and varied expansion packs, only a fool would doubt the development of a sequel – especially with the undeniable fact that Relic are currently riding high as true kings of the RTS. You can bet your sweet bippy (whatever that is) that a *Company Of Heroes* expansion pack will be announced in the near future as well. It's as inevitable as monkeys being funny.



4 PREY 2

It's no secret that this one's in the works. Not only did the original *Prey* feature a spectacularly needless "Quick Tommy! Let's go and do a sequel!" finale, but Human Head man Timothy Gerritsen actually told *PC ZONE* about their plans for more flexible portal technology and markedly improved AI. The following facts are almost incandescently clear: Jen will be right there next to your grandad



6 DIABLO 3 AND STARCRAFT 2

Diablo 3 is probably the worst-kept secret in PC gaming. It's never been officially announced, but we've been doing rumour pieces on it since forever. I doubt that they'd fiddle too much with the mechanics, but a fixed isometric camera will be long gone. Meanwhile, what with a large number of RTS veterans otherwise twiddling their thumbs at Blizzard, I predict there will be some form of top-down love emerging elsewhere. This forecast is partly backed by a job advert on Blizzard.com at the start of 2006 looking for a game balance designer with high levels of experience in *Warcraft 3* and *StarCraft*. With the continual shift and flux of affairs in *World Of Warcraft* making a new single-player 'all out war' storyline hard to envisage, it makes sense that *StarCraft* would get a

Sexy lady says:
"Sequel time!"





Naval combat for *Total War*? It could happen.

TOTAL WAR™



7 TOTAL WAR: NEXT

As you've probably tired of us saying, *Total War* games go in cycles of outright revolution and graphical update and clever tinkering – *Medieval II* being the latter. With said game being crafted in the Australian offices of Creative Assembly, the original Sussex branch have presumably been left to forge the next generation of their RTS barnstormer. Which war? Well if they're planning on implementing naval combat (which would be a logical next step for the series), it would be a good opportunity to bring in the Napoleonic era. That had Horatio Hornblower and all those big posh ships knocking hell out of each other at Trafalgar, while Sharpe and his Irish friend knocked around Spain killing the French. That's my take on it anyway.

CALL OF DUTY

8 CALL OF DUTY 4

As we've previously reported, the word is that the next Infinity Ward game won't necessarily be in the hallowed fields of Normandy and the bombed-out ruins of Stalingrad. Instead, a more modern-day affair has been mooted. The thing is, would the traditional cinematic bombast and monolithic bodycount of *Call Of Duty* really fit a presumably Middle Eastern setting? Might it also be a little politically iffy? It'll certainly be interesting to see how it pans out. One thing that I feel is a rock-solid definite, however, is that (given criticism of



the innate linear nature of *COD2*), matters will be a little more freeform than before.

9 GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

Envelope-pushing follow-ups as they were, both *Vice City* and *San Andreas* were more gameplay evolutions using the same engine than true sequels. Now, with the new RAGE engine in tow (technology that we've seen used to good effect in Rockstar's Xbox 360 *Table Tennis* outing), it makes sense that the *GTA* team would be gearing up for a similar trilogy on the next-gen platforms. As for the setting, Rockstar North have made a habit of recycling locations from the original *Grand Theft Auto*, so odds are even whether they've felt the need to invent a new one. Then again, *London 1969* is yet to be revisited, so perhaps some criminal hi-jinks around Big Ben are possible. In any case, I predict that an announcement won't be far away. And if the PC gets a simultaneous release with consoles then the phrase "I'll be a monkey's uncle" will be heard from miles away.

10 AGE OF EMPIRES IV

According to my divinations, *Age Of Empires IV* will be set during the 20th century. Or at least that's what the back page of the *Age Of Empires III* art book suggests. Developers Ensemble will be heftily busy with 360 RTS *Halo Wars* (and, incidentally, doesn't the sci-fi chap on the far right of the artwork look a little bit Master Chief?), but an official announcement this year is likely.

11 UNANNOUNCED TIM SCHAFER PROJECT

The man behind such classics as *Grim Fandango* and *Psychonauts* is now working on the VU Games dollar. Now, in my opinion, this is a bit of an odd mixture since lovable Tim seems to specialise in brilliant games that don't sell as much as they



grand theft auto IV





The *GTA IV* location is, as ever, shrouded in secrecy.

should, and VU have had their fingers burnt by the 'good games don't sell' paradox more times than most (I'm thinking *NOLF2*, *Tribes: Vengeance*, *SWAT 4*...). I thus foretell that Double Fine's next outing will be just as mind-bending, clever and witty as you'd expect, but that it will also be wrapped into a far more established gaming genre than the 'comedy psychic platformer thing' that was *Psychonauts*.

12 BATTLEFIELD 1942 II

Bear in mind that I have no shred of evidence for this – this is about as mystic as *Mystic Will* gets – but I'm rock-solid in my belief that the next *Battlefield* game will be making a return to the war that made it great. I mean, they've done the present day and they've done the future – the only way to go is backwards and why not return to a form of warfare they haven't touched in four years? With a spangly new engine, that wonderful old theme tune and a whole bunch of Spitfires, they'd be daft not to.

1942: an excellent vintage.



And what's more!

Other stuff that may be happening, as sure as eggs may be eggs



SPLINTER CELL 5

The Ubi-gate ftp leak revealed its existence, and provided Washington DC environmental artwork. The continual attempts to reinvent Sam Fisher will no doubt continue, and sooner or later they're bound to introduce a younger, more irritating Sam Fisher protégé.

MAFIA 2

I'm convinced it'll be announced this year. Illusion are too big to only be developing that *Enemy In Sight* game.

NEW SID MEIER PROJECT

So he's remade *Civ*, *Pirates!* and *Railroad Tycoon*. What's next? If I was a betting man I'd say *Alpha Centauri*. And I am a betting man.

OBSIDIAN/SEGA RPG

With half of Black Isle working there, whatever RPG Obsidian and Sega are cooking up will be special. No clue as to the content, but it'll emerge this year.

SYSTEM SHOCK 3

Being created in-house at EA by the same team who made *The Godfather* game. Don't get your hopes up.

HARRY POTTER RPG

A long shot, this one. But I'm convinced that a semi free-roaming Hogwarts game *must* be in the works.

NEW STAR WARS GAME

We go on about this every other month. The tech is amazing, but will it come out on PC?

NEW SWAT

A shoe-in, surely? Proper physics-laden tazing and police shouting? If it does exist, it won't be Irrational making it though – they're part of 2K Games these days and *SWAT* is a VU Games property.

WARREN SPECTOR PROJECT

"Woof!" I discern Warren Spector's dog Maggie to be saying. "My master's new game is sure to be announced soon! Bow-wow!"

FIFA 08

My sources deep in the heart of EA have exclusively revealed to me that this one is on the cards. Tell no-one.

Will *The White Council* be an *Oblivion* beater?



13 DRAGON AGE

Like *Jade Empire*, *Dragon Age* is a BioWare RPG set in a dice-rolling universe built from the ground up rather than piggybacking something like *D&D's Forgotten Realms*. The difference is, this is a PC-exclusive, a rare thing of joy in a world increasingly dominated by sofa-based 'lifestyle' gaming. My feeling is that *Dragon Age* will build a very big name for itself this year. Described by some as the spiritual successor to the epoch-making *Baldur's Gate* series, its undisputed pedigree and traditional setting should make it this year's fantasy knee-trembler.

14 LOTR: THE WHITE COUNCIL

A game that'll probably frame itself in the run-up to *The Hobbit* (the existing book, and no doubt impending game and film), this RPG is set to track the

exciting adventures of Gandalf, Galadriel, Elrond et al under the command of the currently nice, but soon to be nasty, Saruman the White. Because of the latter's covert leanings towards evil, I expect that the now traditional good/bad balance in RPGs will be present, with more morally reprehensible players doing all manner of nefarious deeds in secret for Saruman under Gandalf's suspicious nose. Even though events are taking place 80 years beforehand, I shouldn't wonder that there'll be plenty of nods and winks to the era of Peter Jackson. As well as all the famous locations, I'd wager on you meeting Aragorn as a ten-year-old kid for example.

15 DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

To re-emerge at the E3 expo thing. To be released by Christmas 2007. So sayeth *Mystic Will*.

The spiritual successor to the epoch-making *Baldur's Gate* series, its undisputed pedigree should make it this year's fantasy knee-trembler



EXCLUSIVE!



The locals usually feed it Wotsits, but now it wants flesh.

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION – SHIVERING ISLES

Will Porter discovers a new land right next to the Nippy Islands and the Bloody Freezing Archipelago www.elderscrolls.com | ETA: Q2

SO WHAT'S THE setup for this first *Oblivion* expansion pack? Someone's left the door open in Nibben Bay, and there's a cold draught rolling straight through it and freezing the locals to the bone. Honestly, whoever it was must have been born in a bloody barn. Someone had better head on into that mysterious door (comprised of linked faces – one looking sullen, the others a bit mad), walk through its open, gaping mouth and do some questing or we'll all catch our death.

Beyond it, you see, is the realm of Sheogorath – the god of madness and dementia who you could watch raining burning dog corpses onto a village of terrified cat people in the vanilla game. It's all a bit wrong in this torn realm you see – and while you'll get to meet the bearded mad-deity in person and plough through his trials – rather excitingly your adventure may well end in his usurpation.

What with this (actually rather sane) god in charge of these islands devoting much of his time to sending people plainly bonkers, you can expect some odd goings-on in the *Shivering Isles*, alongside the expected new dungeons, quests, creatures and freeform niceness.

WHO GOES THERE?

Seen left, for example, is a Gatekeeper golem of sorts – comprised of bloodied spare legs, arms and heads that you can find lying in pieces on tables and hanging on walls in a nearby store-room, *Red Dwarf* Kryten-style. Elsewhere, there'll be Knights of Order to battle, creatures comprised of tree roots and some green chaps called





With more than 30 hours of material promised, quest-lines that branch more than before and a land that you can watch change according to your vital life-or-death decisions, we're all a-quiver. To say that the *Shivering Isles* creates a 'shiver' of excitement would not only be lazy journalism, but also a marked understatement. Expect a goliath feature next issue... **PC7**

With the island god sending people plainly bonkers, you can expect some odd goings-on



HELLGATE: LONDON

Jon Blyth looks forward to 'a massive gash in reality'. Their words, not his...

www.hellgateonline.com/ EITA, 107

TWO MONTHS AGO, I ended a piece bemoaning the lack of a game to better *Diablo II*. I wasn't feigning that lament, having spent enough hours hunting for ruby fragments to warrant serious introspection. But after a moment's thought, I realised that the regret was rooted more in vanilla nostalgia than a genuine desire to go back and play *Diablo* again. Iron Lore's *Titan Quest* mimicked Blizzard's formula excellently, but I couldn't shake the sense of, 'I really don't need to go back here'.

So, having announced to myself that the dungeon trawl is dead, I'm pleased to confess that I'm a slaving visionless moron, and it's *Hellgate: London* that put me in my place. *Hellgate* sets up its stall in 2038, after mankind's neglect of rituals and prophecies – in favour of stupid science, no less – has left us wide open to demonic attack. The ravens have left London Tower and a massive gash has settled onto London. Again: Flagship Studio's choice of words, not mine.

ROLE-PLAY-AWAY!

So *Hellgate* is a full 3D, first-person RPG experience, but don't use *Dark Messiah* as a reference point. *DM* boiled down the RPG aspect in favour of more classic-feeling FPS action, and *Hellgate* is proud of its roots. Think *System Shock 2*, *Diablo II*, hell, think *Deus Ex* too. For RPG nuts, there's that pleasing emphasis on items, equipment upgrading and stats. Not only whether you're using the right weapon – but of the thousands of possible weapon combinations and enhancements that get spewed out by the game, is yours any cop?

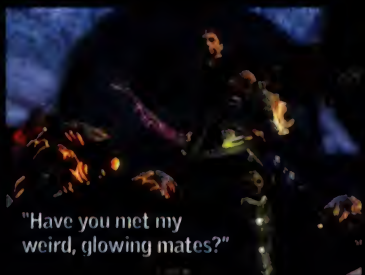
Your choice is to become a pious church-sponsored warrior (Templar) or an

opportunistic knowledge-hunting spellcaster (Cabalist), each with their own preferred methods of despatching the demonic hordes. Templars have a large range of combat and stats buffs; Cabalists can control and mimic the enemy – to the point of stealing their limbs – as well as conjuring traditional energy blasts.

HELL'S KITCHEN

The randomness of the game has already been touted. Random quest-givers, randomised dungeons, items created randomly from the *Diablo*-brand fruit machine of prefixes and suffixes (Immaculate! Mace! Of Smashbastardry!) It's the promise of taking that old-school appeal, adding one dimension and subtracting two persons in a gritty, gorgeous Steampunk London that's providing us with unpardonable titillation.

Flagship Studios – headed by Blizzard legend Bill Roper – have strong experience in the *Diablo* world, so if anyone can rip the format up and give it fresh eyes and a modern feel, they can. Expect to hear more along of the lines of *Hellgate: London* being a welcome newcomer to that most sparsely-populated of genres – the kick-ass action RPG. **W**



"Have you met my weird, glowing mates?"



Hark at fancy-pants.



When flying demons attack.



"Hug. HUUUUUG!"

Hellgate is proud of its roots. Think System Shock 2, Diablo II, hell, think Deus Ex too...

LOST: THE GAME

We're guessing there'll be a jungle

www.ubi.com | ETA: TBA

APPROPRIATELY, THE TRUE nature of the *Lost* game can currently only be guessed at. Survival Action RPG? Free-roaming massively multiplayer text adventure? Who knows. To compensate for the lack of screenshots then, here's an artist's impression of exactly what the final game will look like.

ARTIST'S IMPRESSION



Illustration by Steven Hogarty

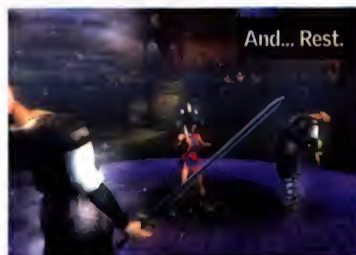
JADE EMPIRE

Mental, mental, roleplay oriental...

jade.bioware.com | ETA: March

UNIVERSALLY PRAISED ON Xbox, but perhaps not as much at the cash tills as its creators were hoping, the now accustomed 'with knobs on' PC release is now fast approaching.

Better visuals, more engaging combat and a smattering of new characters and fighting styles are welcome – but it's the involving storyline, novel setting and patented BioWare path between good and evil (here 'the way of the open palm' and 'the way of the closed fist') that should pique your interest. These include some dark moments (the ghosts of drowned orphans for one), a spot of romance with the NPCs



and a friendly chap called Henpecked Hou who's not only ace at Drunken Master fighting, but also lives in mortal fear of his wife catching up with him and telling him off. A BioWare beauty, and that's for sure.



MASS EFFECT

Could we see a PC release before the year's out?

masseffect.bioware.com | ETA: TBA

EVERY 50,000 YEARS, they come out of their intra-galactic void and into our world. They devour the higher life forms, then go back to their void. Evolution? To the Geth, it's nothing more than a maturing cheese, and we're just starting to look tasty. So far, it's only officially a 360 release, but it's a certainty that *Mass Effect* will appear on PC, perhaps even before the year is out – at least when the console hubbub dies down.

Again from BioWare, this first part of a new trilogy casts you as Commander Shepard, effectively the human ambassador for race relations. You've been given carte blanche in your methods to deal with the Geth threat, so it's up to you to choose the

way you deal with the characters getting in your way. Diplomat? Nutter? Whichever way you fancy at any given time?

Mass Effect blends *KOTOR*'s depth and gameplay (reason enough to get excited) with real-time squad-based combat beyond anything BioWare have yet attempted; first-person combat, allies with their own unique fighting abilities and upgrading Shepard using Biotics implants, which harness the same forces that made interstellar travel possible. The potential for crazy power-ups seems huge...

On top of that, there's a cow with a pair of human arms who milks herself. It's a way off yet, so postpone any less dignified displays of excitement until we tell you more.



TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

Ten years ago, an icon appeared who would change the gaming landscape forever. *Steve Hill* uncovers the new, old Lara...

www.eidos.com | ETA Q2

I CAN CLEARLY remember the first time I ever set eyes on *Tomb Raider*. It was at E3 1996, and sometime *ZONER* Paul Mallinson and myself were doing the rounds. Craning our necks at a Sega Saturn demo, we watched intently as a long-haired wasp-waisted woman swam underwater with her boots on. Not really comprehending what I was witnessing, I looked on inanely while Mallo assured the attendant PR person that the game seemed promising. Something of an understatement, that hirsute beauty was of course Lara Croft, now one of the most recognisable game characters of all time.

Fast-forward a decade and I'm in a luxury suite in a Covent Garden hotel to see the same cocking game! As well as a crushing reminder of the futility of my existence, it's arguably a chilling portent of the future of the medium. If we're turning round remakes in the space of ten years,

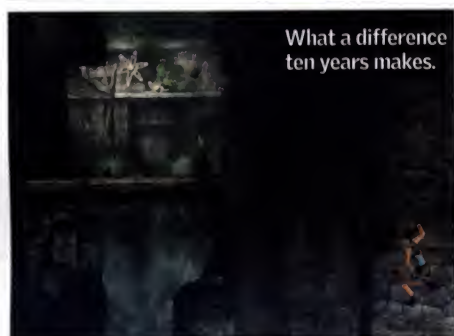




The blue vest is back. Rejoice!



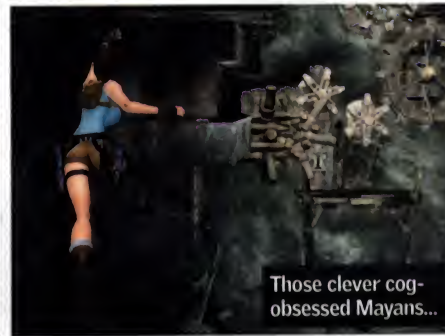
No silly Tokyo skyscrapers this time.



What a difference ten years makes.



Waterfalls: more prevalent in tombs than you might think.



Those clever cog-obsessed Mayans...

"We're making sure we identify the things people recall from the original game, like the atmosphere and the feeling of isolation..."

Dax Ginn, executive designer, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*

then we might as well all go home now. One man who doesn't share this view is *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* executive designer, Dax Ginn (who sounds like a game character himself). Part of the team that rescued the *Tomb Raider* franchise from ignominy following the *Angel Of Darkness* debacle, he's now involved in this timely 're-imagining' of the original game.

"The idea of doing an anniversary edition of *Tomb Raider* came up when we were just putting the finishing touches to *Tomb Raider: Legend*," says Ginn. "We were thinking about what to do next and where to go, and Eidos had received literally thousands and thousands of requests from fans throughout the years to look back at the original *Tomb Raider* game and see what we could do with it in terms of bringing it up to date and re-releasing it as a new game. We took those requests very seriously and started to think about how to approach an anniversary version of *Tomb Raider*."

TEN YEARS AFTER

The obvious thing to do would be to add a few fancy graphics to the original game and get it into the hands of those hapless punters as quickly as possible. But Crystal Dynamics didn't want to do that, wary that

gameplay mechanics that were acceptable ten years ago simply don't cut it these days (try playing the original *Tomb Raider* now).

As Ginn says: "The challenge for us was 'what the hell do you do with it'? How do we create a game which leverages all of the amazing character and level design, along with the atmosphere of the original game without it feeling just like a remake? We looked at how Capcom handled *Resident Evil 4* on the GameCube and we didn't want to be that literal about it. There weren't many analogies in the games sphere for us to take inspiration from."

With game remakes proving largely uncharted territory, inspiration arrived from the film industry, in the shape of a hairy-faced man from New Zealand.

"At that time, Peter Jackson was doing loads of interviews for his *King Kong* film," explains Ginn. "That was a real turning point in the way that we now understand our creative process for this game. Jackson talked about how he was looking at the key moments from the original *King Kong* film, the things that people remember, like the T-Rex versus King Kong fight from the original film, which is also an iconic moment in *Anniversary* with Lara and T-Rex. He took those key moments and made sure that he

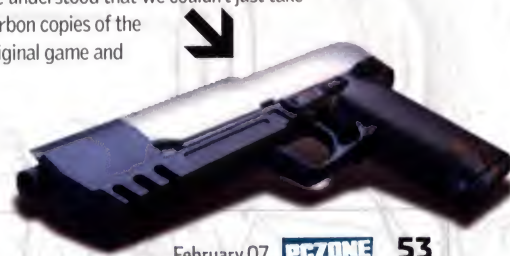
paid due respect in terms of people's nostalgia, recollections and memories.

"However, then all the bits in between that no-one remembers, that's where you exercise a lot of creative license. So that's the way we attacked the design: making sure that we identify the things that people really recall from the original game, things like atmosphere and the way the game made you feel really isolated."

TOP HEAVY

While Ginn has been speaking, Lara has been impatiently waiting onscreen, an idle animation seeing her shift from foot to foot, almost as if to counter the weight of those gargantuan breasts, squeezed once more into the famous skin-tight aqua-marine top.

It's time to unleash her. As in the original, you follow the escapades of Lara as she decimates the wildlife in Peru, Greece, Egypt, and finally, The Lost City. However, as Ginn says: "In terms of the level-design philosophy, we understood that we couldn't just take carbon copies of the original game and





Pointy sticks were the corner-pieces of Peruvian tomb design.



Never a rope-bridge when you need one.



"Haven't I been here before?"

redeliver them. It would feel cheap and would be very cynical. People's expectations of level design have evolved so much that the long, dull corridors that you found yourself running through a lot in the original *Tomb Raider* game just wouldn't wash."

Today we're privy to a brief section from the first chapter in Peru, following Lara's progress from the waterfall room through to the famous encounter with the T-Rex. Beginning with a recreation of the cog puzzle, it essentially involves sticking three missing cogs into an antiquated water-driven mechanism in order to make it work.

Naturally, it looks a lot more impressive than the ten-year-old original, but there's more to the action than a mere facelift. Everything is far more integrated; the water actually appears to be driving the mechanism, and while the spirit is the same, the execution is more contemporary.

ANIMAL CRACKERS

But first there's the execution of a brace of feral wolves to deal with. Emerging from the darkness, they make a beeline for Lara's legs; she pulls out the famous dual pistols and swiftly despatches them like she's never been away (which she hasn't). As was the case in the original, the enemies in *Anniversary* are predominantly animals, something that changes the combat hugely from the human-based gunplay of *Legend*.

Whereas a human with a gun running directly at you would look stupid, with dumb

beasts armed only with teeth and claws it makes perfect sense (and is an ideal excuse for rudimentary AI). As such, much of the combat focuses on evasion, enabling Lara to showcase her dives, rolls and jumps.

SWING IT

Back to those pesky cogs, Lara slots the first one into place with aplomb and part of the mechanism creaks into life. Instead of simply watching what in the original was effectively a cut-scene, Lara actively participates in the action by climbing up the cog and riding it as it turns. To place the second cog, she could jump back into the water and let the current take her to the right place, or she could climb across the front of the mechanism. In the event, she finds an ingenious third way, shooting down a bridge to reveal a grapple point. With an adroitly timed swing on her grapple rope, she uses the felled bridge as a ladder and crawls through a secret tunnel.

Purists may balk at the inclusion of the grapple hook – which only made a fleeting appearance in the original game as part of an FMV sequence – but this is a perfect example of Crystal Dynamics' commitment to player-created paths. It also highlights the 'swiss cheese' approach to level design, with secret entrances scattered liberally around the scenery, offering an array of routes through the game.

As Ginn says: "When you've got choices and options, that's when you feel like

New Lara, new danger

Ten Years Younger with Ms Croft



Lara Croft's back-story has been rewritten so many times it's almost as if they're making it up as they go along. Did she go to Wimbledon Girls School, or was it Gordonstoun? Is her mum dead? Is her dad Jon Voight? Or was that the film?

Anyway, for *Anniversary*, Crystal Dynamics have wound the clock back a decade, which by our maths makes Lara about 24. As such, she's got a bit less slap on, and her hair has been cleared off her face and into some kind of French braid/ponytail. Furthermore, her kit has been pared down to a backpack and a pair of traditional boots, as opposed to the clip-on biker boots of recent outings. The twin guns remain, but no grenades. Best of all, she doesn't have those two dickheads wittering away in her earpiece.

Time had been cruel to Huey, Dewey and Louie.



A good explorer knows their cogs.



Back to basics for the Berkshire beauty.

you're exploring, and that's when you start to feel like Lara Croft."

Even from the short sequence we saw, it's clear that Lara's far more organically involved in the action than the switch-pressing, block-sliding drone of yesteryear. For instance, in one scene she drops on to a platform, and the vibration causes a bridge to conveniently drop down in front of her.

What's more, as well as the entire move-set of *Legend*, she celebrates her anniversary with an all-new move. Known as the 'perch move,' it involves landing on fine pieces of geometry – such as the top of a pole – and tottering precariously before leaping to the next one. The idea is that each move should generate an emotive response: when you're on a ledge you're fairly safe, swinging on a

rope is a bit more hairy, and by the time you're balancing atop a wobbly pole your arse should be going like a trumpeter's lips.

In the space of half an hour, we've seen Lara shoot bears, bats and wolves, but what we really want to see is the showpiece T-Rex. As Lara decimates a selection of raptors, it must be close, and I grip my glass of expensive water in anticipation. Suddenly the raptors scatter, with an unlucky one reappearing above head height to be shattered on the rock face. The Big Momma is at hand, and when the screen starts vibrating like *Jurassic Park* on acid, we can practically smell its breath. Lara turns, her eyes narrow, a look of horror on her face, and... "That's the end of the demo for today." What a waste of ten years. **PCZ**

"When you've got choices, that's when you start exploring and start to feel like Lara Croft..."

Dax Ginn, executive designer, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*



STRANGLEHOLD

"Tequila when the doors are opened! And Tequila when they're calling time!" warbles *Will Porter* www.midway.com | E3A Q2

AS YOU WELL know, *Stranglehold* is playing itself as the ultimate blend of game action and cinema – with John Woo actually giving his time to the project as well as his name, a digitally rendered Chow Yun-Fat and some of the most destructible scenery ever seen in a game. Statues crack, puffs of feather-cushioning burst from chairs and upholstery, chairs and tables are broken into their constituent wooden lumps as you pirouette gracefully into them in slow motion – it's neck-deep in graphical and technical wonderment.

But what more do we know about John Woo's step into the digital world? Quite a bit actually – including the fact that the old man who played the Key Maker in *The Matrix Reloaded* has also been rendered in pixelated form with more casting details to follow... The plot deals with Tequila (Woo's most famously hard-boiled cop, played by the cocktail-stick-chewing Yun-Fat) trying to save his girlfriend (conveniently daughter of a mob boss), who's been kidnapped by a rival gang – with the action being based around locations in Hong Kong and Chicago.

CREAKING BONES

In terms of environments for you to blow up, in addition to the docks, teahouses and floating casinos previously shown to *ZONE*, you can add a few interesting explosive and bad-guy-littered levels to the list.

For example, there's a museum complete with a T-Rex skeleton you can break into many, many individual fossils; and a Diplodocus whose ancient neck you can slide down while shooting a variety of Asian men in the face with a shotgun. There's also a big room of ancient Chinese terracotta statues you can duck and dive around as well (perhaps not quite appreciating that they're over 2,000 years old and priceless).



Every penthouse apartment should have a shoot-out.



Yun-Fat: police record somehow unblemished.

Statues crack and tables are broken – it's neck-deep in graphical and technical wonderment

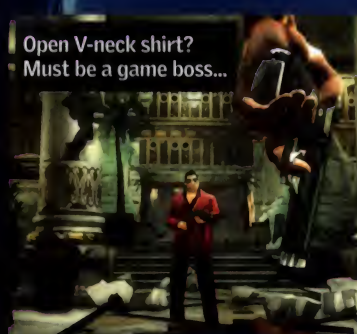
In addition, there are a variety of markets, each selling the sorts of produce that look good when shot in half (watermelons, pig carcasses, electrical goods and the like).

HARD AS NAILS

But, seeing as this is a sequel to *Hard Boiled*, can't we also expect a bit of slo-mo shootery and innocent-patient massacre in a hospital?

"We have situations and actions in the game that happened in the hospital scene in the movie, but we're not using the actual environment," smiles Alexander Offerman, the game's producer. "You'll probably pick up on some of these while playing the game. The teahouse is really our homage to *Hard Boiled*. Since we're making a sequel, we didn't just want to recreate the original movie verbatim."

Well, OK – but if Yun-Fat doesn't a) get a big old bandage over his left eye; and b) have one or two needless clarinet solos, then we're getting out our angry sticks... **PCZ**



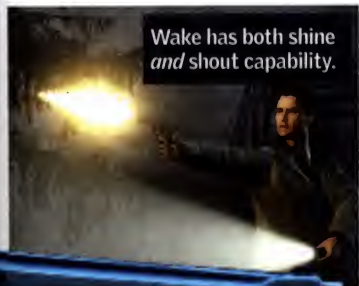
Open V-neck shirt? Must be a game boss...



Now featuring destructible pig carcasses.

ALAN WAKE

There's a stranger in town... www.alanwake.com | ETA: TBA



Wake has both shine and shout capability.



Conifers: potentially imaginary.

REMEDY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL

INSOMNIAC thriller, with a grieving pun-named horror-writer hero has been cruelly beckoning us like an imaginary prostitute since 2005's E3. We're still crawling blindly towards a release date somewhere in 2007.

Although Remedy have flatly declared that Alan is "no Max Payne", in context they were talking about the game character. Distancing themselves from their previous classic is a necessary part of emphasising Alan's unique newness; the inventors of bullet-time might not be giving their new character magic powers, but other similarities are too stubborn to ignore.

The brooding style, the disorientating hallucinations, the eponymous hero's narrative voiceover, the stunningly produced and atmospheric sound effects. The aspects of *Max Payne* that pushed it beyond excellent shooter and into well-loved masterpiece are all intact.

The differences are just as obvious; Bright Falls is open to *GTA*-style exploration with side missions dragging you deeper into



Note the elbow patches. Wake used to be a supply teacher.

the plot. As night falls, the uncanny drift into Alan's nightmare landscape is evocative of *Silent Hill*. And beyond lazy comparisons to other genre classics, we can also lazily comment on the dazzling graphics. They're dazzling, for the record.

Until now, it's been virtually impossible to get excited about something called Alan. However, as the rumours and information coagulates, perhaps that's Remedy's greatest achievement of all.

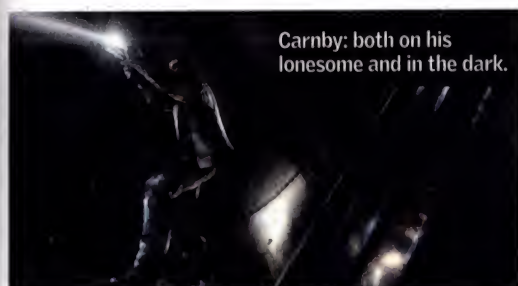
ALONE IN THE DARK

Lack of light: fantastic

www.eden-studios.com | ETA: TBA

UP UNTIL RECENTLY, all *Alone In The Dark* meant to more modern gamers was watching Uwe Boll's last appalling movie in an empty cinema.

However, Eden Games – developers of the forthcoming *Test Drive Unlimited* – are hell-bent on reinventing the tired 'survival horror' series by, well, ditching the 'survival horror' tag and instead using action movies such as *Die Hard* for inspiration. As Edward Carnby, you have to use your environment as a weapon, picking up and manipulating hundreds of objects to examine, throw or wield as improvised tools or weapons. Set in a huge open, satellite-mapped Central Park New York, *Alone In The Dark* is already making our hearts beat a little faster.



Carnby: both on his lonesome and in the dark.

ASSASSIN'S CREED

Cyberpunk goes medieval www.assassinscreed.com | ETA: Q2

YOU KNOW THOSE cute little mutts, who, when their owners return after popping down the shops get so excited that they wag their tails so hard they often end up wetting themselves? Well, that's how we feel about *Assassin's Creed*.

It's not hard to see why either; the ex-Prince Of Persia: *Sands Of Time* team have pulled together a mouth-watering combination of violent combat, acrobatics, open cities populated by huge crowds, gorgeous graphics and a historical setting. Or at least, that's what they'd have us believe.

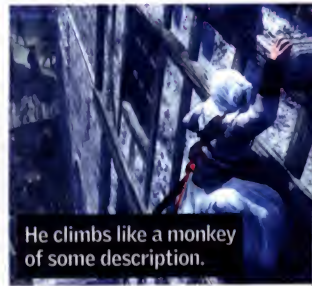
However, coy nudges from Ubisoft representatives are forever suggesting that as the player, you exist in the near future – and are living through some form of transplanted memory. A scene of Altair dying seen by *PC ZONE*, for example, was followed not by a 'game over' screen, but rather by a first-person perspective where you're seen to be taking off a pair of goggles. Intriguing...



He flies like an eagle!



He fights like an alleycat.



He climbs like a monkey of some description.

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

While cruising in Hawaii, *Suzy Wallace* flashes at strangers

www.testdriveunlimited.com | ETA: Feb

WE'VE SEEN FREE-ROAMING driving games before, but the idea's never been used to its full potential – and certainly not online. *Test Drive Unlimited* looks set to change all that though, with an entire Hawaiian island as its setting and over 1,000 miles of twisty tropical tarmac for you to lay some rubber on.

As well as the picturesque landscapes rushing by your window, the island plays host to a bevy of car dealerships where you can purchase new vehicles, a local police force ready to issue fines, a variety of CPU challenges (from standard races to tasks like transporting a vehicle without taking any damage), a selection of clothing shops and even houses to buy. Owning a home offers the opportunity for bigger and better garages to store your vehicles in, while the clothing options give you the chance to

ridicule other people's dress sense when they wind down their in-game windows.

Developers Eden Games have assembled a pretty impressive garage of cars for you to choose from too, with over 125 licensed vehicles wedged in. And don't worry that your career will begin with a clapped-out Fiesta either – pretty much every vehicle rates quite highly on the desirability scale. Whether it's a gentleman's Aston Martin, a nimble Lotus or a bit of American muscle you're after, everyone's tastes are catered for. What's more, your choice isn't just limited to four wheels either, with a selection of bikes adding yet more variety.

TDU will feature plenty to do, both on and offline, but where the game really promises to shine is in the multiplayer. Borrowing liberally from the massively multiplayer genre to create its own little

The chariot of footballers and drug dealers alike.



Now you see him...



niche ('MOOR' or Massively Open Online Racing), *TDU* will see you cruising the streets besides other online players. If you fancy starting a race, it's simply a case of flashing your lights, setting the waypoints on the map and kicking their butt. You can even place wagers or race for pink slips.

As is standard for the genre, you can tune your car with official parts as well as organise car clubs where you and your racing chums can chat, trade and organise online competitions and races. And we're sure that if you want to, you can do doughnuts in a Honolulu carpark too.

This community factor looks set to add another dimension to the normally staid world of racing games, and could really separate *TDU* from its rivals. With the PC version also receiving a hardcore mode to cater for sim enthusiasts, *TDU* should please car nuts and *GTA* fans alike. Our driving gloves are waiting ... **PC**

Make enemies by disrupting races.



Smuggling fireworks in the boot was a mistake.



TRACKMANIA UNITED

The Gallic export that isn't cheese or flick-knives

www.trackmaniaunited.com | ETA: March

WHAT HAVE THE French ever done for us? Well, there's *TrackMania* for one. The little racing game with the great big heart that occupies more bandwidth in France than stuff about urban rioting and snails.

TrackMania United is essentially a compilation of every iteration of the game wrapped into a remarkably speedy and shiny modern-day engine. So that's stadium courses, rally courses, the twists and turns of the original's desert courses and the beautiful vistas of *Sunrise* et al, mixed in with all the track design and car customisation so beloved by the TrackManiac collective. A community which, by the way, *United* is squarely intending to expand with some

remarkable online capabilities – a setup not unlike the MySpace revolution.

Coppers, the game currency, can now be both earned in-game and spent online, allowing budding track designers and car-pimpers to sell their wares online – while all manner of online rankings and racings will be a mere click of the mouse away. With over 100,000 fan-made maps available already, you'd have to be a fool or a UKIP voter to not be excited. Or both.



Coulthard gets a bit lost.



E.T. eat your heart out.

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT

Not half as filthy as it sounds www.codemasters.com/dirt | ETA: TBA



Sideways driving...



More sideways driving.



And going over jumps. Yep, it's Colin McRae all right.

TARMAC. YOU SPEND your entire life inventing it (if you're Scotsman John Loudon MacAdam), and then a crowd of louts don't even bother driving on it. The most famous driver in the world (after a bunch of Formula One guys and the *Top Gear* people) is returning to deliver his perennial spit in the face of Scottish invention with *Colin McRae: DIRT*.

"For the first time in the series you'll be able to race head-to-head in a number of championships, vehicles and courses," claims Gavin Raeburn, executive producer at developer Codemasters. "We've also included the CORR off-road series, Pikes Peak Hill Climb and Paris-Dakar style trucks," he adds. The new damage system

sounds pretty hot too. "Damage will range from a few paintwork scratches, right the way up to literally being able to wrap the car around a tree or other solid object," grunts Raeburn, rocking in his seat. Nice!

PCZONE
GAMES OF
2007

THE
MAN
WHO
KNOWS



News fresh in from **Moneyopolis**. The value of Monopoly money has finally been compared to the money that really matters – *WOW* Gold. **Paid researchers** have calculated that *WOW* Gold, cashing in at around two cents a piece, is worth MUCH more than Monopoly money, which will set you back \$3.50 for a replacement pack of \$15,000. But **the smart money's** buying *Anarchy Online* – at over 1,000 credits to every Monopoly dollar, research suggests there's never been a better time to buy property in Old Athens. Don't these people have REAL jobs and families to support?

A 23-year-old student has been **arrested** in Japan after being uncovered as a **kingpin** in the murky underground market for pretend weapons and currency. The **shameful** trade, which is rife in online adventure-simulators such as *Lineage II* and *Guild Wars*, often involves the use of 'virtual sweat shops', in which hundreds of **Mexicans**, possibly children, are enslaved and forced to spend their lives building **fictional objects** such as magical shoes and hats – purely for the purpose of selling at online auction. Racking up an astonishing **150 million yen** worth of Internet auction deals for his ill-gotten gains (£700k in proper money), his **dramatic** arrest was cheered by many an Internet-addicted recluse as a strike against online criminality. Unfortunately, however, far from being hounded by a team of cyber-heroes such as those in acclaimed **Angelina Jolie** blockbuster *Hackers* or the mid-'90s BBC series *Bugs* that starred **Henry out of Neighbours**, the Chinese student was actually arrested for breaking the terms of his student visa. Essentially working as an **illegal immigrant** and in **direct violation** of the Japanese Immigration Control and Refugee Law, it's widely thought that on his release from prison, the individual involved will start the more accepted career of picking **Brussels sprouts** for next to no money in a field somewhere outside of Towcester.

"The shameful trade often involves the use of 'virtual sweat shops', in which hundreds of Mexicans, possibly children, are enslaved"

LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

"Once Hobbiton, twice Shire," laughs a jolly *Jon Blyth* lotro.turbine.com | ETA: Q1

AT A STRETCH, you can think of MMO subscriptions as the dome at the end of *The Crystal Maze*, filled with tenners. There's Codemasters, NCSoft, EA/Mythic all hopping around, stuffing tenners in their pockets and slapping each other. Pull back to reveal Blizzard, underneath the dome, reclining in a chaise longue while a massive Henry vacuum cleaner drags millions of tenners over its half-naked body. To mix a metaphor, *Shadows Of Angmar* is Turbine's trebuchet, set to rain rocks on the money dome. If Tolkien can't tip the *Warcraft* cash cow and, um, turn off its Hoover, then no-one can.

LOTRO has been in beta for a while now, and Turbine recently opened their doors to us magazine types, so news of early gameplay has finally begun to emerge. And, no surprises, the game will feel comfortable to *WOW* players, with a similar HUD and

mission structure. Players who find it hard to turn down a mission will find plenty around, and quests don't all necessarily revolve around death and/or delivery. The game takes place over the entire trilogy, so the early tasks have no mention of the War of the Ring and may be as whimsical as a game of hobbit hide-and-seek.

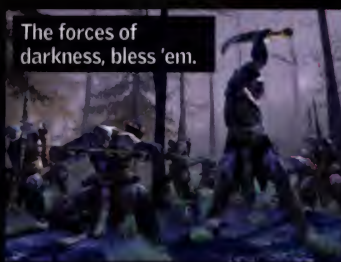
SPELLING IT OUT

The Lore-master is the principal magic-using class in *LOTRO*, but in a world where magic is a rare currency, this was always going to be tricky to pull off. Lore-masters are part-priest, part-shaman, raising party morale (the equivalent of hit points) and calling on nature. The Minstrel is another quasi-magical class, boosting morale with a song (à la "Bravely bold Sir Robin...").

The translation of common spell effects into Middle-earth must have been difficult,




Pointy hats, bearded midgets – the works.



The forces of darkness, bless 'em.

but it's been handled in a convincing and enjoyable way. For example, burglars (rogues in *WOW*-speak) can confuse and stun sentient enemies with their riddle skill. It's not magic, you see – you just ask your foe a tricky puzzle.

Any reservations? There's no serious option to be the bad guys, although you can join Sauron's masses in the PvP Monster mode to provide benefits for your main character. And the fantasy world might seem a little vanilla – this is, after all, where it all began, and the ideas have been considerably embellished since 1954.

That said, Jackson's films surprised everyone with the near-universal sense of recognition, and the game brings a similar – yet different – feeling of comfort. And in time, perhaps, with this *LOTRO* outing, we may yet live to see the hobbits' homes razed to the ground at the series' close... 

HUXLEY

Team deathmatch on a goliath scale

www.huxleygame.com | ETA: TBA

SET IN AN isolated area near the Mediterranean that suffers from storms, earthquakes, radioactivity and general devastation (our money's on Magaluf), *Huxley* promises high-speed FPS action in a persistent MMO world. Giant futuristic cities will be surrounded by 'battlezones' that bear witness to *UT*-style clashes between the Sapient and Alternative tribes.

Of course, the 'MMOFPS' is an idea that's been tried before, but with Unreal Engine 3 under the bonnet, *Huxley* may just have the grunt to succeed. It'll be more fun than waiting for Sony to make another *PlanetSide*, that's for sure.



Sometimes, you've got to suffer for fashion.

AGE OF CONAN

When 'barbarian' was a job description

www.ageofconan.com | ETA: March

FUNCOM'S POTENTIAL DAZZLER of an MMO begins in intriguing fashion, with ten single-player levels to complete before you even set foot in the multiplayer world.

You start off washed up on an island, with shackles rigidly locked onto one of your arms – it's all a bit like being Jin in *Lost*. One friendly blacksmith later, and it's all combat, combat, combat as you carve a bloody swath through a brutal fantasy land.

With horse-riding and combat (and camel-riding and mammoth-riding to boot), as well as PvP that allows for you to build and defend your own towns and villages, there's more to *Conan* than oiled-up pecs.



Unflinching gore and loincloths abound.

TABULA RASA

Big men with guns – in space!

eu.playtr.com | ETA: Q4

A GAME WHOSE name derives from the thesis that we're born as a blank slate and develop our individual

selves by interacting with the world around us (just like in an MMO lolz!), *Tabula Rasa* is a futuristic MMOG with sublime developer pedigree.

It's the latest creation from MMO visionary Richard Garriott, and promises fast-paced shooting action in a war against a gigantic alien threat. The vast

universe takes in volcanic moons, verdant forests and many other sci-fi staples.



Dinosaurs need a regular hose-down...

PCZONE
GAMES OF
2007

Even wolves are getting into dwarf-tossing these days...



"That's MISTER rat-face goatboy to you."

WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

Another proper *WOW* rival? You reckon?

www.warhammeronline.com | ETA: Q3

IT'S BEEN CANCELLED, it's been uncanceled, it's been endlessly compared to *World Of Warcraft*, but *Warhammer Online: Age Of Reckoning* is steadily creeping its way towards release like some mangled T800 cyborg, hell-bent on pleasing us with MMOG goodness.

We're told it will differ from *World Of Warcraft* (no, honestly it will), in that it's a much more PvP-driven game, taking place in a world which is actually AT war rather than a world populated by two factions who merely dislike each other a bit and show up in red on their respective interfaces. Realm versus Realm combat will see entire races take up arms against one another, while developers Mythic promise that quests will never be about mindless collecting. Instead, they'll revolve loosely around the ongoing conflicts in the world at large, asking you to assassinate other players and capture certain locations. Speaking of Realms, the recently announced Chaos army are touted as looking like nothing the fantasy genre's ever seen (and it's seen a lot), with mutations and all sorts of lovely stuff coming out of them.

Whether it'll offer enough to even make a dent in *World Of Warcraft* remains to be seen, especially with *The Burning Crusade* primed to draw in another couple of million subscribers. Even now though, the *Warhammer Online* hype train is gathering impressive speed.



SPORE

Ten things to make you more excited about *Spore*

www.spore.com | ETA: 2007

- 1** You can throw a cow-like being into space with a UFO, and if going at the right speed, it'll settle into an endless orbit around your planet.
- 2** The customisation of your creations in *Spore* doesn't end at giving your lifeform claws, or even bums for eyes. The tribal section lets you edit huts, the city phase puts you in architectural command of buildings, vehicles become malleable and later on, UFOs and entire planets come under the knife of customisation.
- 3** Will Wright is on record saying: "I didn't want to make players feel like Luke Skywalker or Frodo Baggins. I wanted them to be like George Lucas or JRR Tolkien."
- 4** After your lifeform's creation, the creatures around you will all be the designs of other *Spore* players in the real world. If the circle of life is a little too easy around your nest, then the game will notice and draft in a race of predators from a hard drive far distant to your own.
- 5** In the City/Civilization sections of the game, you'll get to create planes, boats, submarines and dinky land transports.
- 6** In Space, you can choose to make first contact through violence or firework displays – or you can go down the 'play sweet music' route.
- 7** If you love your creature very dearly, EA are planning on providing a service that'll model it in plastic for you.
- 8** Every organism can be scanned and put in your own *Spore*-paedia, which can in turn be converted into a collectable card game of sorts.
- 9** When you come to a deserted planet in Space, you'll be able to place a 2001-style monolith that'll cause residents to metaphorically leap around, throwing bones in the air to classical music. When you return later, there should be someone clever enough to have a chat with. Or blow up with lasers.
- 10** You can build a Death Star laser to blow up planets with.



The never-ending battle of the primary colours.

SUPREME COMMANDER

Andy Robinson scrolls further down into the insanity of single-player *Supreme Commander*...

www.supremecommander.com | ETA: February

AH, PARIS – THE city of love. And, for today at least, the city of giant UEF faction ice sculptures, 70ft robotic drunken frankensteins and the craziest RTS zoom control you've ever seen. Today too, it's also home to grinning development legend Chris Taylor, attempting to feed something called Chartreuse to yours truly, a drink so powerful it was originally invented by Tibetan monks to keep warm in snow storms.

A few hours earlier though, I'd been introduced to the world's first hands-on with the single-player campaign of *Supreme Commander*, Taylor's latest epic RTS that lets you command armies in the high thousands, and step on trees with armaments seemingly designed in a GoBot factory.

B-B-B-B-BUILD

"Have you ever played an RTS game," asks Taylor, "where you've got to build your base, you've won the objective and then the next level starts and you build your base again? By the fourth or fifth time you're going, 'Come on, these bases are identical!' Or, more than that, the designers start taking that away from you and start just giving you bases. Well, we don't do that."

I begin to see what the enthusiastic RTS overlord means when I jump into the solo campaign as the alien-fused Aeon – the side Taylor says are hardest to master. The first

map is a small island barely large enough for my hulking Armoured Command Unit to stomp around, but after completing a few simple build objectives that ease me gently into the resource system, the map expands to reveal a new shore, and then later a second island – effectively tripling the size of the original playfield. As Taylor points out, this provides a stream of new missions without changing maps, and certainly looks to be one of the most promising features of *Supreme Commander*'s single-player campaign.

SLIPPERY WHEN WET

While messing around in boats (and subs) in the solo campaign, the battles are as epic as ever, with each individual turret on the deck of my hulking destroyer shooting its payload to devastating effect.

The epic showboating doesn't end there either, as the map eventually quadruples in size to uncover a whole chain of islands and another pair of battling armies – one friendly, the other not. You see, a big complaint in *Total Annihilation* – Taylor's last strategy opus – was the poor computer opponents, so it's not surprising that a generous amount of attention has been lavished on this area.

As a result, my freshly-uncovered AI buddy barks out requests via a



Dinghies vs planes.



And it burns, burns, burns, etc.



Stop fighting it, it's massive.

Taylor's latest epic lets you step on trees with armaments that seem to have been designed in a GoBot factory

Command & Conquer-style video window, ordering me via some impressive voice-acting to distract enemy UEF air forces southwards, so that she can flank them from the top. This objective is accomplished by assaulting a small UEF island with my amassed fleet of attack-boats. Meanwhile, my AI partner plays surprisingly realistically, and uses believable strategy in her commands – sending in transports for sneak attacks and going on bombing runs with aircraft.

CAN'T WAIT...

It's a truly exciting concept to see how this AI partner gameplay evolves in the latter stages of the game – especially when there's six or seven separate commanders bantering and battling across the battlefield. It could well turn out to be a more than worthwhile distraction from *Supreme Commander*'s already excellent online offering – and luckily we haven't got long to wait before it descends on shops with its awesome epicness. If epicness is a real word. **PCZ**

Spiderbots killed the video star

FMVs are back in style

Mmm... Tilty.



Supreme Commander's battles are already as cinematic as some sort of crazy *Lord Of The Rings* and *Terminator* tie-in, but single-player goes a step further with detailed FMV cut-scenes pushing the story along, excellent voice-acting and a rolling score painting the futuristic war between UEF, Cybran and Aeon. "I wanted the story to mean something," says developer Chris Taylor. "I wanted it to tie-in to the fictional universe in a far more meaningful way and I think we've managed to accomplish that."



"I'm the Juggernaut!"
Of course you are dear.

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

"Is this your first time with a harvester?" asks a *C&C* producer to a flailing *Will Porter* www.ea.com/commandandconquer | ETA: Q1

THEY'RE HERE, AND Lando Calrissian knows it. "This is war against an enemy unlike any that mankind has ever seen!" screams a wild-eyed Billy Dee Williams, hiding out in an Icelandic bunker as the alien menace thunders overhead. "If you don't use everything in your power... If you don't use every asset available to fight this war right now... Then you are failing every man, woman and child on this planet!" Then suddenly, he mellows. "Do the right thing commander... That's all I can ask... Do the right thing..." Ladies and gentlemen, the FMV has landed – and so have the new faces in the third act of the *Tiberium Wars*.

The first place they strike is fair London town, a 'blue zone' city unaffected by the crystalline tiberium plague that's turning

our planet into a toxic, yet energy rich, wasteland. "The GDI unambiguously sees them as the invaders: they show up, their intentions are hostile, they start laying waste to cities and fighting both GDI and Nod troops," explains *C&C3* executive producer Mike Verdu when I quiz him. "Kane, on the other hand, keeps on referring to these guys as 'the visitors' – and it's clear that there's some kind of agenda..."

But what does this mean for the *C&C* franchise? The delicate balance between the solid, dependable, build-and-conquer GDI and the sly, finesse and stealth techniques of the Nod is about to be trampled upon merrily – and one false move could spell disaster for the Westwood enclave at EA. So with such an unflinching

juggernaut of a franchise, just how very dare they shake things up?

JUST MOVED IN

There's more than a touch of *World Of Warcraft*'s Draenei to *C&C*'s friendly neighbourhood alien invaders – perhaps it's in their shimmering light blue colourings and rather bulbous crystalline vehicles and units, although there's also a vague insectoid nature in there too. They've been camping out just beyond the orbit of Neptune you see, and they've been there for generations – just waiting for when the time is ripe and juicy for an attack. And that time would appear to be 2047.

Now I don't want you to start thinking that the very fabric of *C&C* is being broken

Ballistics: brilliant!



Are they the invaders or the visitors?



The delicate balance between the solid, dependable GDI and the sly stealth techniques of the Nod is about to be trampled upon merrily

The series is at a crossroads. (ROFL!)

(for better or worse that certainly isn't the case), but the invaders are strikingly different in concept from anything the series has seen before.

"To some extent we've named the alien units as they would be perceived by GDI and Nod, so the basic alien infantry are called buzzers," picks up Verdu as we hover behind one of his accomplices, busily playing through a GDI mission set in the battered shell of Cologne in Germany.

"To a GDI soldier on the field they would seem to be a cloud of intelligent flying razor blades. They flock and swarm almost like a swarm of particles across the battlefield; when they come into contact with you, they spin around and cut you to shreds." As he finishes, a tripod with wavy medusa tentacles sprouting from its top appears, firing independent laser blasts in every

direction and making strange squeaking and screeching noises. It's instantly noticeable too that it's shrouded in the aforementioned alien infantry buzzers...

"Yes. They can also combine with other alien units, so you essentially get this protective cloud," nods Verdu as the GDI scream for help on the monitor below us.

Don't mistake this for the reinvention of the wheel though. Yes, the invaders have warp bubbles that summon units through worm-holes rather than the traditional conveyor belt approach. Yes, they can summon and control flashy ion storms that boost their own units while hassling others; and yes, they even have a unit that gobbles up tiberium, then pukes it all up over passing human troops and incinerates them. However, the new C&C faction still works very

This used to be Tewkesbury.

Enter the A-list

Technically you're the star, but this lot come along for the ride



REAL NAME: Sawyer, the grumpy swindler from *Lost*.
AKA: Josh Holloway.
ROLE IN C&C: Tactical prodigy who provides you with battle plans before each Nod mission. Having never seen the horror of front line warfare, he gets greater and greater doses of reality as the war progresses.



REAL NAME: Lando Calrissian, Death Star-destroyer and token African-American *Star Wars* representative.
AKA: Billy Dee Williams.
ROLE IN C&C: A suave career politician from the GDI camp. Sees world affairs as a way of improving his career, and gets ever more loopy as the game goes on.



REAL NAME: The bad guy in *Total Recall*.
AKA: Michael Ironside.
ROLE IN C&C: Your stiff lipped, never-say-die, 100% honourable and no-bullshit GDI commander. He's basically who James Earl Jones was in *Tiberian Sun*, only he sounds strangely like Sam Fisher...



REAL NAME: Number Six – the totally fit, yet baby-murdering Cylon in the fab new *Battlestar Galactica*.
AKA: Tricia Helfer.
ROLE IN C&C: Reprises her 'gorgeous and evil' persona as the second in command at Nod HQ. She'd rather sit where Kane does though, which causes fireworks.



Build, rush, destroy.
Good old C&C.



The alien base:
sinister, eh?



C&C grunts don't have
a great life expectancy.



much in the venerable build/harvest/rush/defend fashion. This isn't a *Supreme Commander*-style rethink of the RTS genre – it's a consolidation of years and years of the C&C franchise: slick, pretty, effective, mega-budget and (E.T. totally withstanding), back to basics.

SO YOU'RE BACK, COMMANDER?

I soon discover this for myself when I'm pitted as GDI against a fellow journalist who's limbering up as a servant of Kane. While I'm immersing myself in the familiar procedures of building power stations, sending out harvesters and wandering up the production ladder, I can't help but notice how slick everything is.

The friendly C&C toolbar may be iconic, but in C&C3, its use has been streamlined – it's almost iPod-like in its ergonomic yet deep design. Much as I hate to parrot the promises made by Verdu when I interviewed him back in May, the whole affair does feel crisp, clean and vital in a way that few RTSs have ever mustered.

Soon, I've mustered a happy collection of Mammoth tanks, goliath Juggernaut walkers and a smattering of Orca gunships. Now, I'm in the mood for something a little more substantial than the sniper/infantry and flametank/pitbull confrontations my

Nod adversary and I have been sharing at the crossroads at the centre of our urban map. Leaving behind a skeleton defence force, I send my chaps to the north-east of the map, ready the airforce and click and select one of a few applicable formations. Then I set walker and buggy alike, travelling at the same speed into the jaws of the valley of death. As soon as my planes leave the airstrip however, a huge Nod force decloaks a fraction to the south of my base and the counter-offensive massacre begins. "Wanker!" I exclaim loudly.

Heading my opponent's attack force, in front of a flotilla of stealth tanks, is an Avatar War Mech, a 40ft bipedal creation that the Nod commander can upgrade at his whim. Fancy nicking the flame-thrower component from a flametank and sticking it on? Go for it. Think a stealth field generator would help your walking metal hulk camp outside the enemy's base? Then pluck one from a stealth tank.

Either way, what Mike Verdu casually calls a "flame-spewing, beam-firing, stealth bipedal robot of death" is bearing down on my base with surprising vitesse. Now if my defence force weren't scampering back through a Tiberium patch several miles away, and if I had any engineers who weren't being toasted in a beautiful billow

of flame by a flametank, then I might have been able to knock the damn thing down and take it over myself. As matters stand, however, I'm pretty well screwed.

VANQUISHED

As the dust settles on my ignominious defeat, I sit down, steal a consolatory pain de raisin from a nearby journalist feed-trough and have a good old think. *Command & Conquer 3* is dead-set on providing the well-trodden, clean, solid RTS experience that both the diehard fans and marketing execs demand – again, it's not a revolution. But at the same time, there is an unknown factor.

The Tiberium universe may have been crying out for an injection of mystery and wonderment, but are these blue fellas the ones to do it? Are their otherworldly capers and visuals a little too 'out there' for a series that's previously defined itself on flames and hard steel? At the same time, will their cool ion storms and razor-blade infantry prove to be gimmicks cut-and-pasted over a well-worn template? To be honest (and I'm aware that I'm paid to have opinions about this kind of thing) it's impossible to tell yet – I haven't seen enough.

What I can tell you is that the rudiments of the game are pixel-perfect. The undimmed joy I felt as I heard the



Grid Wars: 3D.



I wonder where they got the idea
for these unusual Star-Craft...



C&C3 is the well-trodden, clean, solid RTS experience that both the diehard fans and marketing execs demand

All's Wells that ends Wells

More tripods than Jessops...



The Tripods: make the game now!

The chances are a million-to-one they say. But still they come. And they're all bloody tripods! *UT2007*: tripods. *Half-Life 2*: tripods. *C&C3*: tripods. What is it with extra-terrestrials and three-legged death machines? The time is clearly ripe to create a game based on the 1984/5 BBC TV series *The Tripods*, itself based on the books of John Christopher. Essentially a tale of people standing in fields running away from tripods as fast as they can, it's not a matter of *if* the game will be made, but *when*. Tripods FTW!

first harvest of tiberium trickle into my refinery completely obliterated the many lingering doubts I had about *Command & Conquer: Generals*.

More than any of the sequels and spin-offs, *Tiberium Wars* genuinely feels like a dyed in the wool *C&C* game. The FMV sections (a series hallmark) are priceless – and the prospect of having extra-terrestrial FMV sections in the alien campaign (EA will only say that the sequences "won't be live action") is certainly intriguing. Will the visitors be talking to you, the alien commander, through a series of clicks and whistles? Will you crush Kane and Michael Ironside alike, squishing them under your blue insectoid/crystalline leg-like appendage? Watch this space, commander. **PC**



The visitors: big fans of *Stargate SG-1*.



"You'll never take our arid, uninhabitable landscape!"

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AND COUNTING. Whether you want to shoot or strategise, race or roleplay, play sports or play with your kids, Xbox 360™ has the game to answer your every whim, rush, and glory-soaked desire. xbox.com



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Jump in.

 XBOX 360™



Miss WOW

IN CASE YOU missed my rant on the forum, I recently stumbled across a site called Miss Video Game, a project apparently designed to raise awareness of female gamers. Great, I thought – maybe they'll have lots of real female gamers who actually play games, not just models who are paid to hold a gamepad upside-down.

However, my hopes were soon dashed upon reading through the site. The first damning piece of evidence? "Miss Video Game must... Love the beach." On the next page, the phrase "even if you don't know anything about videogames, sign up", was the nail in the coffin, not to mention the pages and pages of women trying to 'showcase' their gaming talents via a bikini shot. I'd laugh but I'm too busy trying to line up a headshot on the organiser...

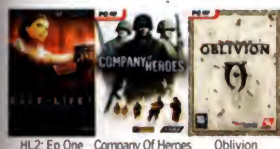
P.S. – in case you're wondering where our reviews of *Star Trek: Legacy*, *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, *Catz* and *Dogz* are, Ubisoft didn't send us code in time. Secret play or innocent mistake? We're not sure, but don't buy any of them until you've read our verdict...

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games



GAME OF THE MONTH

70

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

Has the tactical shooter just hit the jackpot?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	2GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 76 **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: KNIGHTS OF THE NINE**
- 78 **PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE**
- 79 **IL-2 STURMOVIK: 1946**
- 80 **HAPPY FEET**
- 80 **PERIMETER: EMPEROR'S TESTAMENT**
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- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
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- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at yourshout@pczone.co.uk

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

Strippers, slots and blackjack take a back-seat as the war on terror comes to Sin City. *Martin Korda* places his bets on justice...



"Come on, hands up. Who wants to get shot first?"

DEVELOPER
Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER
Ubisoft
WEBSITE
rainbowsixgame.uk.ubi.
com/vegas
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

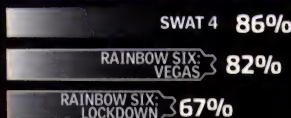
AT A GLANCE...

The latest instalment of the team-based shooter series sees a new Rainbow squad combating terror in Vegas. Powered by Unreal Engine 3, it mixes frantic action with slow, strategic gameplay.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS



IRENA MORALES is a very naughty girl. Not only has she been sticking soggy pieces of chewing gum to the underside of tables, she and her team of Mexican terrorists are also dabbling with the idea of blowing up Las Vegas with a big bomb that goes boom and breaks stuff into little pieces. Sounds like a job for the Rainbow team and I'm not talking about Zippy, Bungle and George.

Rainbow Six: Vegas is a fairly triumphant return to form for the venerable *Rainbow Six* series, with Ubisoft Montreal striking an excellent compromise between the visceral realism so revered in the original *Rainbow Six* games and the all-out action approach so reviled in *Rainbow Six: Lockdown*. There's also far more location diversity this time around, with tight, claustrophobic areas mixed up with wide-open, sprawling spaces.

BACK ON FORM

The result is a superbly paced campaign of room-clearing carnage, as you and your

two AI-controlled sidekicks (the usual third member of your team seems to have gone AWOL) work your way through enemy-infested territories in order to save hostages and shatter Irena's plan of making the contents of a 100,000 slot machines rain down on the Nevada desert.

But before we get into the meat of the game, I need to make a confession. I like wearing... No, wait, wrong confession. What I meant to say was that for the first couple of missions, *Vegas* excited me about as much as a naked, wart-ridden granny (which is to say not at all, in case there was any lingering doubt your mind on that one). Starting out in a dusty Mexican town, *Vegas* makes the kind of first impression usually reserved for someone who's just turned up at a party and pissed on the carpet.

After having your eyes offended by the blocky front-end, the campaign's early missions then proceed to totter on the verge of tedium, feeling starved of entertainment, direction or tension, and

lulling you into a false sense of insecurity for what's to come. Pockets of enemy resistance are wiped away with nonchalant ease as you cleave your way through the first couple of missions like a scimitar through butter. But then, all of a sudden, everything changes...

VEGAS BABY

After such a slow opening, you suddenly find yourself immersed in what's undoubtedly the most intense *Rainbow Six* game to date as the action switches to the light-drenched streets of Sin City itself.

It's here that you first start to appreciate *Vegas*'s excellent damage system, which breathes new life into the series by allowing you to take anything from a couple to four or five shots before you drop dead (depending on whether you're playing on the 'Normal' or 'Realistic' difficulty setting).

However, unlike the 'three strikes and you're out' mechanic employed in previous *Rainbow* games, *Vegas* offers a tad more



After a slow opening, you suddenly find yourself immersed in the most intense *Rainbow Six* game to date as the action switches to Sin City

respiration space, by enabling you to duck down behind cover for a few seconds in order to regenerate your health.

What's that you read? Regenerating health? In a *Rainbow Six* game? Surely not! To which I retort, worry not my would-be anti-terrorist friend, because it's actually great and works in perfect unison with the well-spaced checkpoint save system.

When a chunk of searing lead pounds into you, your vision blurs violently, temporarily incapacitating you (or as good as). In this brief period, the enemy has the opportunity to close in and outflank you. Brilliant, right? Well, almost. See, it would have been brilliant had the AI showed a consistent level of intelligence and tactical guile. Once again, the developers seem only too keen to push out the boundaries of graphical fidelity while the field of artificial intelligence is left miserably overlooked.

One minute you and your team are slinking your way through dank corridors, listening to the excellent incidental dialogue

of two enemies situated around the next corner, before engaging in a seesawing firefight which sees the enemy taking cover and attempting to outmanoeuvre you.

Then, the next thing you know, you and your buddies are storming a room packed with villains, who, on your arrival, saunter around with general disinterest before kneeling down in the middle of the room, utterly ignoring the fact that you and your team are standing next to them with assault rifles pointing at their skulls.

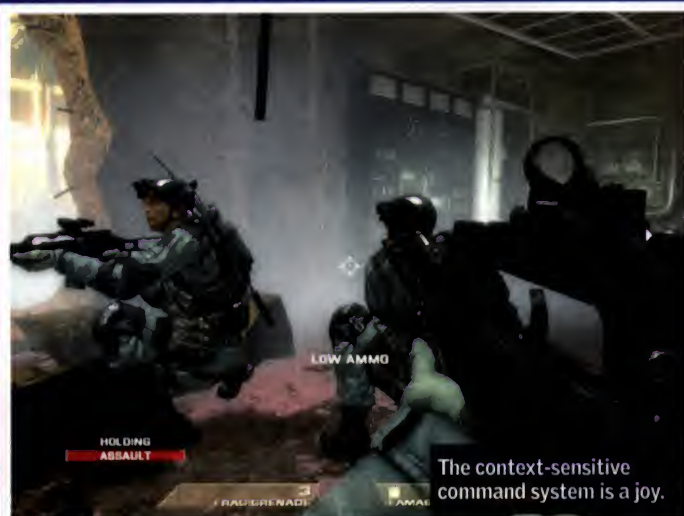
DUMB FACE

The problems with Irena's goons don't stop there, as they don't fare too well in the looks department either. In fact, the majority of them seemingly share the same sister and father, judging by their identikit, inbred, expressionless faces. You'd really expect better from a power-hungry beast like *Vegas*, which is driven by none other than the in-vogue Unreal Engine 3 and needs a fairly substantial set of specs to run smoothly.



Click & conquer

Click once, click twice and go, go, go...



The context-sensitive command system is a joy.

As is becoming the norm in squad-based strategy shooters, *Vegas* sports a context-sensitive command system with which to issue orders to your squad. Whether it's stacking them up in preparation to storm a room packed with terrorists and hostages, telling them to attack a certain enemy or ordering one of them to defuse a bomb while you hold off the enemy onslaught, this point-and-click system is a joy to use, allowing you to co-ordinate many cunning manoeuvres and frequently outflank the enemy. It's just a shame you can't issue orders to individual members of your squad – but given how close the two of them clearly are, they probably wouldn't have followed them anyway.



Don't fancy yours much. Or mine...

While the locales are admirable – if hardly breathtaking – the majority of characters look dull and wooden by comparison. Hardly a compelling argument to make you shell out the best part of £250 on a 3D card so that you can play the game at a decent frame-rate, or even at all.

DUELS AND DUALITY

The unevenness of both the visuals and the AI is perhaps fitting, given that *Vegas* swings from the sublime to the substandard on a regular basis. And while the emphasis remains firmly biased in favour of quality throughout, there are precious few areas immune from criticism, a



The only way to arrive in Vegas.



The story unfolds through a series of live news-feeds.

crying shame when you consider that *Vegas* has enough potential to suggest it could have been one of the finest team-based shooters ever to grace the PC.

However, one feature does manage to emerge untarnished by the wagging finger of judgement, and that's the new cover system. Whereas in earlier *Rainbow Six* games you'd find yourself clumsily leaning or 'slicing the pie' around each corner till your sights came to rest on the back of an enemy's cranium, you now have the option of pressing yourself against a wall and ducking out from behind cover to shoot at your opponents.

It's these moments that constitute some of *Vegas's* most captivating and intense gameplay. With the game's new, more frenetic pace (though still not as frenetic as *Lockdown*), taking cover creates a host of new options for you to tinker with. By slapping your back against a wall, the action switches to third-person mode, allowing you to monitor the movements of your enemies as they approach your hiding place. Think *Splinter Cell* on a caffeine trip and you'll get a rough idea of what I mean.

MOMENTS OF TRUTH

Your heart races as foes bear down on your position, the elevating soundtrack laying down a syncopated pulse while you wait for the perfect moment to duck out and unleash a salvo. There are few more satisfying moments than swinging out of cover and dropping a bad guy with a perfectly placed headshot, or laying down suppressing fire while sending your lads on a flanking excursion – replete with a packed lunch which the little blighters probably ate on the bus. In other words, there are plenty of opportunities to utter those immortal words: "I love it when a plan comes together." And that, surely, is what this type of tactical shooter is all about.

Not enough for you? Then how about the ability to shoot around corners without exposing yourself at all – a perfect tactic when an enemy bullet has distorted your vision and you need to buy some recovery time. In a word, brilliant.

Shame then that the same can't be said of your team-mates. Yes, they're highly (perhaps overly) compliant to your every whim (issued through a sublime context-sensitive command system – see 'Click & Conquer', left). However, they feel like a pair of conjoined twins forced apart against their will. These boys never leave each other's side, practically holding hands and exchanging wistful glances as bullets fly past their love-filled eyes.

To their credit, the lads can't half shoot, and it's all too easy and tempting to just send them on ahead to scope out an area, while you remain in relative safety behind a 4ft-thick concrete wall. It's a situation that's made worse by their seeming indestructibility. You may not be able to take much damage yourself, but these guys eat it up like a Fat Club member let loose on a shelf of pick 'n' mix.

Admittedly, you do have frequent call to take on the role of squad medic – sticking healing injections into your team-mates' backsides whenever they take a hit – but you never feel as though they're in any mortal danger. After you've revived them, you can just send them straight back into the danger zone with a pat on the back and a kind word. This isn't so much of a problem in the fiendishly hard 'Realistic' mode, but in 'Normal', it can sometimes be a serious hindrance to the tension levels.

STICK AND TWIST

Other areas are just as hit-and-miss. The voice-acting ranges from wooden to wonderful, with your character sounding like a hillbilly who'd be more at home shooting tin cans off tree stumps with his

"I'm sure you said it was Casual Friday..."

No need to expose yourself here.

pa's shotgun than blasting the entrails out of a bomb-crazed terrorist.

The physics are generally impressive, but collision detection is suspect. Your arsenal is stunning both in terms of scope and realism but a smattering of weapons are sorely misjudged, especially the shield, which allows you to crawl around levels practically impervious to damage.

Hit-and-miss, hit-and-miss, hit-and-miss. That's *Vegas* in a nutshell.

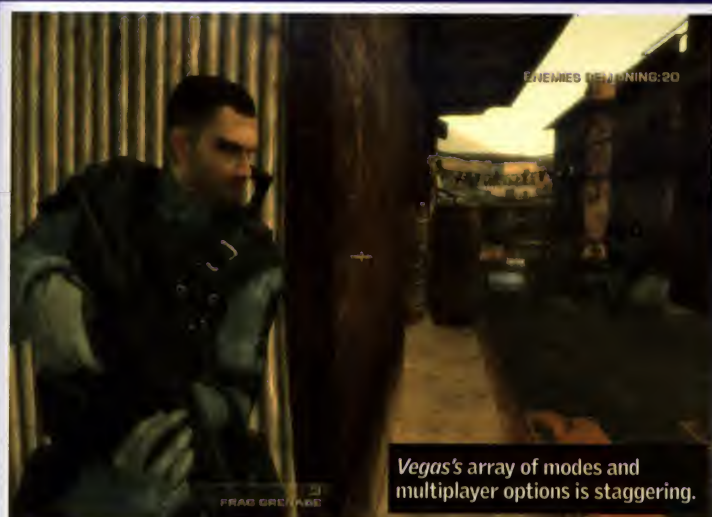
Now I don't want you getting the wrong impression here, because *Vegas* is in no way a poor game. It's really not. Far from it.

It's an experience packed with thrills, tension, excellent pacing, a myriad of top-class multiplayer options and a half-decent plot that throws a few swerve balls at you when you're least expecting them.

The real problem is that it simply isn't as good as it could have been. Erratic AI, overly impervious sidekicks, some suspect voice-acting, patchily impressive and hugely power-hungry visuals. It's a list that adds up to a missed opportunity if ever I've seen one, but while *Vegas* may not quite have hit the jackpot, it does still manage to walk away a winner. **PC**

With a little help from my friends

The campaign ends but the fun doesn't have to...



Vegas teams with extra options to extend your fun once you're done with the six- to ten-hour story-driven campaign. You can choose to go solo in Terrorist Hunt missions, which reveal just how much harder the game is when you don't have a couple of willing, virtually indestructible sidekicks following your every order. There are also eight multiplayer modes to enjoy, including: Co-op mode, where you and up to three other wannabe Rainbow warriors can tackle the single-player campaign together; Attack and Defend, which sees one team defending an objective while the other attempts to wrest control from them; and good old-fashioned free-for-all contests where you have to kill anything with a pulse while staying alive. Now that's what we call variety! Rival shooters bow your heads in shame.

PCZONE

Graphics Fairly impressive but power hungry
Sound Varied, perfectly judged score. Patchy voice-acting
Multiplayer Excellent and varied

- ✓ Great new Cover features
- ✓ Decent balance between action and stealth
- ✓ Top-notch team command system
- ✓ Superb multiplayer options
- ✗ Too many hit-and-miss features
- ✗ Your team-mates are too powerful

82

A mixed but ultimately winning hand

Looking for the perfect



NEW

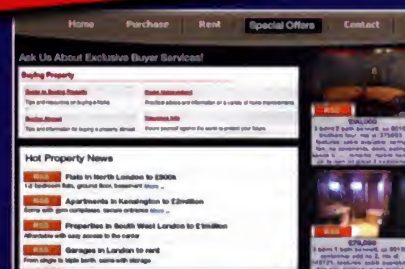
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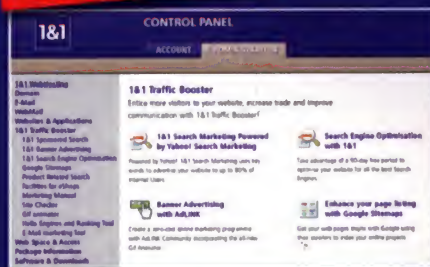
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NEW



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Armoured horses: costly.



The Thieves Den already has some occupants.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: KNIGHTS OF THE NINE



The biggest RPG ever gets bigger. *Sam Kiildsen* suddenly feels very small

DEVELOPER Bethesda Softworks
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.elderscrolls.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

Bethesda shovels all the downloadable content for *Oblivion* onto one disc, including a new 'huge-ass' quest. Only good knights need apply.

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION	95%
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: BLOODMOON	85%
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: KNIGHTS OF THE NINE	74%

SO, YOU'VE BEEN merrily playing *Oblivion* for a few months and you've seen everything. You've hiked up hill and down dale. You've skipped through meadows picking wild flowers ("Umm, they're for, er, alchemic purposes. Yeah, that's it."). You've vanquished thousands of mudcrabs and you've become the head of every guild in Cyrodiil. What do you do now?

Well, if Ubisoft and Bethesda have their way, you shell out another 20 notes for this expansion pack, which brings together all the official downloadable content on one disc. That means you get the patch, some armour for your horse, some spell tomes included in the random treasure, the Mages' Guild Orrery, the Wizard's Tower, the Thieves Den, the Vile Lair, the Mehrunes' Razor adventure and a brand-new adventure called *Knights Of The Nine*.

The latter adds an entirely new faction of crusading knights, so that means a new stronghold, a slew of fresh NPC characters and baddies and, most importantly, a big ol' quest to undertake. Bethesda claim the quest will take you

around 15-20 hours to complete, but I whizzed through it in about five or six.

GOOD KNIGHT

Short as it may be, it's actually better than many of the faction quests in the original game. I won't spoil any of it by talking specifics, but it's a well-written series of trials and dungeon-crawls designed for do-gooding, noble-hearted characters, and the items and rewards you gain mean that heavily-armoured fighters will get the most out of it. Evil, backstabbing souls need not apply – wicked acts will quickly see you drummed out of the knightly order.

Good as it all is, we're not sure if this lot is worth £20. The problem is that most of the downloadable content is aimed at specific character types: a pure combat character probably won't give a stuff about spell tomes or a Wizard's tower, while the average mage will find the powerful new quest items totally useless.

You're far better off just choosing the content you want online, and this works out a hell of a lot cheaper too, even if you buy everything (£12). Is it really worth an extra £8 to own a box and a disc? **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics As lovely as ever
Sound Nice new voice-acting
Multiplayer Don't be silly

- ✓ Lovely shiny new quest
- ✓ Nice items and strongholds
- ✓ It's more *Oblivion*!
- ✗ Costs too much
- ✗ New stuff not useful for everyone
- ✗ New quest's a bit short

74

Download it instead

THERE'S A REASON NIGHTMARES HAPPEN IN THE DARK.

Mankind has no one else to turn to. Nowhere else to run. The planet is falling apart. Its people cornered within the only safe area remaining. The Locust Horde has risen and they won't stop coming. They won't stop killing. The government turns to whoever they have left. The sick, the wounded, the imprisoned. An inmate named Marcus Fenix. Once left to die, he is now humanity's last hope. He can take comfort in but one fact. The human race isn't extinct. Yet.

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The FMV intro gives no indication of the horrors within.

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DEVELOPER Sega
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE

phantasystaruniverse.com

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PRICE £29.99

(Plus £6.99 a month)

Compare it to any other MMO and they'll probably be a better alternative

AT A GLANCE...

An MMORPG without the 'massive' part that fronts repetitive, archaic gameplay with a gaudy anime finish.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%

RF ONLINE 64%

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE 37%

TO MOST PEOPLE, time moves forwards. However, in the arse-backwards development cycle of *Phantasy Star Universe*, it feels as if Sega have put together not only one of the most disappointing MMOs ever released, but taken us back to the heady days of lacklustre 56k gaming on the Dreamcast.

If you've had the chance to play the first two *Phantasy Star Online* games, you'll have some inkling of what *PSU* has in store; you walk into an area densely packed with monsters, hammer one or two buttons to beat them to death, walk out with a bit of money, then head back home to synthesise yourself a new weapon.

The problem is that the gameplay hasn't changed since then. Unlike *EverQuest II*, there's no epic storyline. Unlike *World Of Warcraft*, there's no gigantic world, raiding or varied content. In fact, compare it to any other MMO out there and they'll probably be a better alternative.

FINAL PHANTASY

The online (Network) mode is made up of several 'planets' and 'colonies', which roughly translate in lazy-MMO slang into 'hubs' which you can buy stuff in or use to travel to missions. These missions are usually a two-dimensional hack-and-slash affairs, and

This is about the extent of *Phantasy Star's* 'universe'.



no matter how hard Sega pretends, the gigantic universe boils down to a few planets, with a few enemies, along with missions that are a monotonous slog.

Battles are simplistic real-time bash-fests that are won by strafing around enemies, shooting, hitting, dodging obvious attacks and healing yourself. While most MMOs have a huge menagerie of creatures per zone, each 'planet' in *PSU* has its own small stable. Beasts rush you and you beat them, and then do it again and again in a slightly different order – and across each mission there's little change. It's all the same things being thrown at you in bigger, higher-level waves until you level enough to move on. That's alright though; *Phantasy Star Universe* is only made up of four worlds of painful, repetitive content.

As if to add insult to injury, the game looks, feels and reacts like a wonky console port. Attempting to play it without a game-

Graphically, *PSU's* great – it's a shame about the game, really.



The gaudy anime storyline is hilariously bad.



pad is high-on impossible, and even doing so is a process of trial and error as you work out what each button does, and exit to reconfigure – there's no way to do this in game, and the defaults are awful.

When you do get going, the menus have an awkward limp to them – and there's no mouse support. It's a messy, unintuitive shambles that would've looked amateurish years ago – let alone in this day and age.

STAR BORES

It's hard to understand why Sega released *Phantasy Star Universe*, except to pick up the few desperate fanboys. There's no storyline to Network mode, and no real point to missions beyond endless monster-mashing and key-hunting, with the occasional boring boss battle. Regardless of having a monthly fee, the game lags even while going solo, with apparently dodged attacks knocking you over and other players



Some of the environments are remarkably sparse.

Story mode

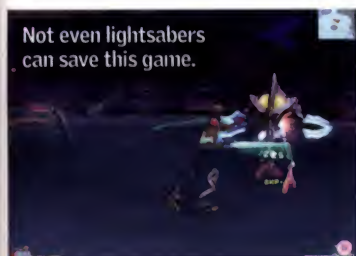
Don't like fun? Don't like variety? This is for you!



Phantasy Star Universe is laugh-a-minute stuff.

Possibly to justify the lack of a free trial, Sega have put in a bizarre Story mode that serves to dramatise the various areas you play through online. In fact, it actually manages to have much more of a point than the Network mode, involving you moving skater-boy Ethan Waber through a badly written storyline with awful, hammy voice-acting. Naturally, it's just as mind-numbingly repetitive as the rest of the game.

Not even lightsabers can save this game.



PC ZONE staff meetings are a sombre affair.



Introducing: the starshit troopers.



sliding around like they're on ice. The entire package is a pointless cycle of fighting, buying, making and selling that has no rhyme or reason; unless you're talking about the Story mode, which is an embarrassment of an RPG.

Even the crisp, high-resolution graphics can't save this ridiculous failure of an MMO. *Phantasy Star Universe* is nothing more than the laggy, repetitive transvestite cousin of *Zelda*. Avoid this like a Paris Hilton-borne strain of bird flu. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Gaudy, crisp anime looks
Sound *Blake's 7* sound effects with awful Japanese techno-jazz
Multiplayer If you can call it that

- ✓ Reasonably pretty
- ✓ Plenty of free content...
- ✗ ...But gets repetitive quickly
- ✗ Laggy as sin
- ✗ Offline mode crap
- ✗ No free trial

37
Phantastically bad



IL-2 STURMOVIK: 1946

Clean up on *IL-2*

DEVELOPER Maddox Games
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.il2sturmovik.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

System requirements **2**



I'VE GOT IT, I've finally figured it out – like a CSI detective in front of a whiteboard full of lines and squiggles and circled words. First came *IL-2 Sturmovik*, then came the standalone expansion *Forgotten Battles*, then came the two further non-standalone expansions *Ace Expansion* and *Pacific Fighters*. Now comes another standalone expansion, *IL-2 Sturmovik: 1946*, named after one of the three campaigns it contains, those being 1946, Sturmoviks over Manchuria and the PE-2 campaign.

Mercifully, *IL-2 Sturmovik: 1946* is a single installation which includes everything this series has ever spawned. That means it's upped the aircraft count to over 300, it features hundreds of new missions and a handful of new maps too. The new content includes some of the insane prototypes those Nazis were working on before we stopped them, most notably a bizarre dual-rotary

All alone.



VTOL plane which is pretty much impossible to land once airborne. Other than the alternative-future Hun-jets, the expansion catalogues a swathe of missions across China.

As it stands, it's the only sensible way to purchase *IL-2*, especially if you're planning on taking it online, as most servers demand at least the first three expansions be installed. It takes a bit of a knock over the steep asking price for what is clearly an ageing title, and the new content is mashed sim-potato for fans, but for a while at least, it'll remain the definitive *IL-2* collection.

Steve Hogarty



You nincompoop.



IL be back



They don't look too happy with their feet, do they?

HAPPY FEET

Contains mild peril

DEVELOPER Artificial Mind & Movement
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE happyfeet-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1

IF YOU HAPPEN to believe in the almighty one and the creationist theory, then penguins must have been what god managed to cobble together at 3am after a night of copious drug-taking and propping up the bar at his local. Flightless, aquatic and unable to walk without looking like they've just followed through, they're a subject of worldwide fascination. This time around, they've managed to avoid David Attenborough but have been collared by Warner Brothers for their feel-good family feature – and this is the obligatory dire gaming tie-in.

The game is, perhaps rather predictably, a massive pile of crap. Despite being squarely aimed at the younger end of the market, its major



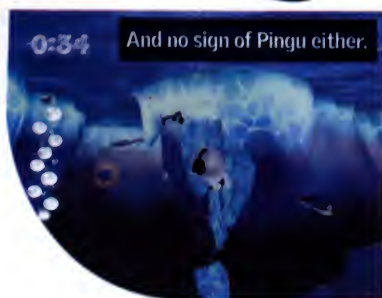
Ice ice, baby.

downfall is that the developers have been cheeky enough to cobble together an entire title from three mini-games.

The first is a rhythm-action game à la *Dance Dance Revolution*; the next is a tedious sledding game in an SSX-style, but minus everything that ever made that series fun; and rounding out this less-than-stellar bunch is a badly-handling, on-rails collecting section. Each one is then lazily regurgitated time and time again, until the point where even a six-year-old would kick the developers in the balls and demand a bit more variation.

Combine all of this with some sloppy console graphics, and it starts to shed new light on why penguins disappear for months at a time. Mr Attenborough would have you believe that they're off feeding, but I reckon it's just the shame.

Suzy Wallace



0:34 And no sign of Pingu either.

PCZONE
24
Dead on its feet



Fundamentalist terraformists.

PERIMETER: EMPEROR'S TESTAMENT

Back to the war on terra

DEVELOPER Paradox
PUBLISHER KD Labs
WEBSITE www.kdlab.com/eng/projects/project_view.php?id=30
ETA Out now
PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

System requirements 3

THE ORIGINAL *PERIMETER* was one of those games that was easier to admire than enjoy. The developers really chewed up the RTS rulebook, creating bizarre nuggets of sci-fi strategy so original as to be almost unenjoyable. Getting your head round the unit-morphing systems and the terraforming principles felt a little like learning the periodic table back in 2004 when the game first surfaced. With the release of this update, it feels like revision time.

This belated sequel doesn't raise the bar over its predecessor. The units, graphics, gameplay and missions don't break much new ground – in fact, the once-impressive visuals are now dated.

The admirably innovative gameplay still feels like it's from Mars. Missions are set on strange, malleable alien worlds where all the terrain can be



The jell-o perimeter in action.

morphed by your industrious terraforming bots. Creating flat spaces allows you to build generators, which create energy, used to build structures and units. It's impressive stuff, although everything can be morphed, morphed and morphed again to the point where sometimes you no longer know what you're morphing, or why.

Even for a seasoned *Perimeter* panhandler, this standalone expansion is tough from the outset. Without a tutorial, this is going to be rocket-science to anyone who's not played the original. But for those boffins who clicked with *Perimeter's* out-there gameplay, this expansion packs a raft of rock-hard missions to keep egg-heads distracted for weeks.

Steve O'Hagan



You want to morph again? Go ahead.

PCZONE
72
Stranger than sci-fi

SCAN



SCAN.co.uk

...and it just got better...



E D I T I O N



XFX 7950GT XXX

PV-T71J-YHD9

Scan Part Code 'LN16431'

HDCP capable

GPU core Clock 610Mhz / Memory Clock 1.6Ghz

24 Pixel Pipelines

DUAL DUAL-LINK DVI supporting 2 displays up to 2560 x 1600

SLI Ready

ATI 'X1900 BUSTER'

XFX has the only passive 7950 GT available



XFX
play hard.



It even comes with a warning about its own 'evil' content.

PATHOLOGIC

What a happy, simple game

DEVELOPER Ice-pick lodge
PUBLISHER GMX Media
WEBSITE www.pathologic-game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99
System requirements 2

WHAT'S **PATHOLOGIC** ALL about? First, a group of children bury a doll. Then a theatrical scene introduces a doctor, a haruspex (gory soothsayer) and a young girl, who are debating an unspecified dilemma. You then choose to play as the doctor or haruspex (completing it with either unlocks the girl), and appear in an unsettling Steppes town where you must investigate a disease/scarecrow/cannibal that's killed an immortal and plunged the town into anarchy.

As you puzzle through the plot, a giant carved crow and a mime artist crop up and talk directly to you, the gamer, about game theory. Horrifying binbag monsters arbitrarily attack you. Characters talk in badly translated allegories, spin poetry and philosophise about fate in a looping narrative. We couldn't imagine a more



"It's fun to stay at the Y, M..."

pretentious, pseudo-highbrow experience without putting Brian Sewell and Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen in a gene-splicer.

There are issues. The combat is mind-bogglingly hard. The language is so convoluted you rapidly experience word-blindness. It shares the lush sadistic design of the legendarily bastardly Harlan Ellison game *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream*. Each day you must do the right things in the right place at the right time or you will die, simply put.

If you're open to having your brain stretched in a world that's both gorgeous and unfair, then give *Pathologic* a try. Be warned though; it's ultimately more a work of art than a game, and you will have to suffer for their art.

Dan Griliopoulos



Super Monkey Ball it ain't.

PCZONE
64
The critical path



Makes you long for a bit of *Pathologic*.

ERAGON

It's got Jeremy bloody Irons in it!

DEVELOPER Stormfront Studios
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.eragongame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99
System requirements 2

NO DOUBT RIDING on the residual beard-chic left by the *Lord Of The Rings* movies, *Eragon* is billed as the next big thing in the fantasy flick world, and funnily enough the game isn't all that different from EA's previous Tolkien action games (it's even been fudged together by the same team). As such, it's a basic hack-and-slash adventure with simple combos, drop-in/drop-out co-op and combat that gets repetitive very quickly.

The combo system is dead simple, with moves made up of three button combinations resulting in beat-downs that most of the time look very much the same. There's also a bow you can whip out for ranged kills and grab manoeuvres with a bit of bullet-time thrown in for good measure.

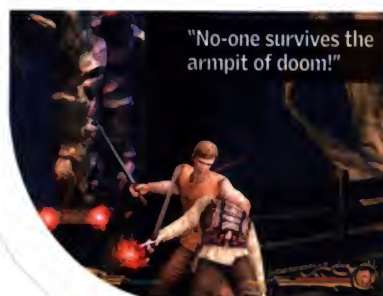
You play a fabled 'dragon rider', which means you can call upon a fire-breathing beastie for some pre-



scripted carnage when you're in a tight spot, as well as flap about on the back of one in some *Panzer Dragoon*-style stages. Flying around roasting enemies and firing arrows is a fun distraction from the vanilla foot combat, but the flight stages are hampered by the uncontrollable camera which sometimes makes dodging rocks and trees a real pain.

If you can put up with the repetitive combat, *Eragon* is a reasonably enjoyable outing. However, in the end it has nothing to offer that we haven't already seen in a thousand other hack-and-slash adventures.

Andy Robinson



"No-one survives the armpit of doom!"

PCZONE
58
Seen it before



EVERQUEST II: ECHOES OF FAYDWER

Strap on your pixie-wings

DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment
WEBSITE everquest2.station.sony.com/
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements **4**



A GREAT DEAL of MMOs forget the concept of value-for-money with their expansions, but *EverQuest II: Echoes Of Faydwer* delivers bountifully to both the wide-eyed, rat-stabbing newbies and the 12-hour-a-day elite maniacs.

Opening up another of the ruined continents of Norrath, new players can start as the miniature winged Fae or take the boat over to Faydwer to experience the new content, which covers the entire spectrum of levelling – you could even stay there from level 1 through 70 if you really wanted to; there's enough monsters, dungeons and quests to fight through.

They've added two new, lighter trade-skills in the form of tinkering (for making little gadgets) and transmuting (basically a copy of the

WOW enchantment system), which require less effort than the current trade-slogs. Old *EQ* players will also be greeted with various throwbacks to the original, ranging from the starter city of Kelethin for the Fae, to the Steamfont Mountains, to the end-game content inside Castle Mistmoore. The new continent is huge, varied and does a fantastic job of keeping the grind as invisible as possible – even better than *WOW* at times.

While it's not necessarily going to bring in new players, *Echoes Of Faydwer* is as attractive as it is bolstered with new content – everyone from hardcore trade-skippers to constant raiders to newbies are catered for. If you've got the time for an MMO, this may be worth a try; if you're an established *EQ2* player, this is absolutely essential.

Ed Zitron



PCZONE
83
A fairly good time



ZOO TYCOON 2: MARINE MANIA

Sea the world

DEVELOPER Blue Fang Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft Game Studios
WEBSITE www.zootycoon2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements **1**



TAKING THEIR CUE from Maxis' expansion-meister *The Sims*, Blue Fang seem to be churning out these *Zoo Tycoon* expansions at an alarming rate. It seems the life of a zoo keeper is never dull (but it may well be full of crap).

This time round, the emphasis is on getting your feet wet by setting up aquarium-based exhibits – think along the lines of *Sea World*. You can now build tanks in your parks and fill them with the requisite fish, sea mammals, coral and rock. Despite the 20 new animals, this proves a little underwhelming and the building itself is pretty fiddly if you try to experiment with anything flashy, like underwater viewing sections.

However, the title's saved from being a total waste of time by the

ability to train your animals and put on shows. You can either duck out of the hard work by hiring a trainer, or do it yourself, which consists of tracing a line and pressing the right buttons at the correct time. It's hardly rocket science, but then, neither is the act of exploiting marine mammals for cold hard cash.

The graphics are looking pretty tired by now too, and there's only a measly two new campaigns for you to try, despite the extra 20 challenges. Hardcore fans of the series will no doubt love the additions; for the rest of us, the most fun you'll get out of this will be dropping your visitors into the shark tank.

Suzy Wallace



PCZONE
61
Over-fished

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE? PARTY EDITION

If we did, we wouldn't be reviewing computer games, etc...

DEVELOPER Climax
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.wwtbamthegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 1



I CAN'T IMAGINE that any review of this game doesn't begin by pointing out that the thrill of *Millionaire* is rooted in simplicity, high stakes and schadenfreude. They should then point out that a home version instantly wipes out the last two factors, leaving you with unadulterated simplicity – a bunch of questions, one after the other. If you do well, it simply leaves you feeling cheated and angry that someone hasn't given you £125,000. If you do badly – well, at least you know you shouldn't waste your money texting the TV show.

Single-player works well enough. It's lonely and futile, but it works. Just use the mouse and click around. Suffer the infuriating stereotypes, of course – chav,

toff, boxer, surfer... There's a repetitive cliché to irritate everyone.

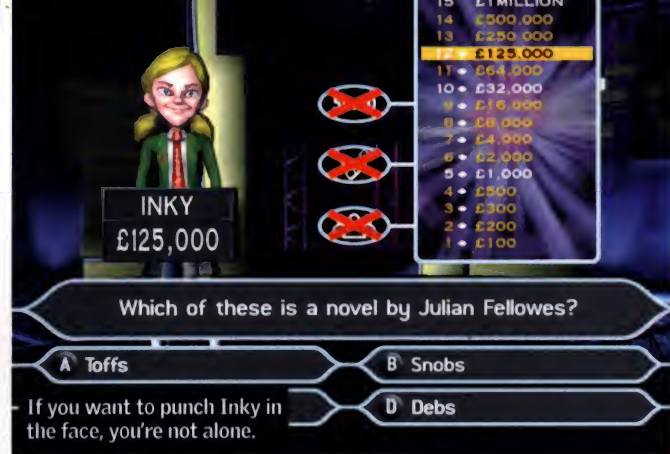
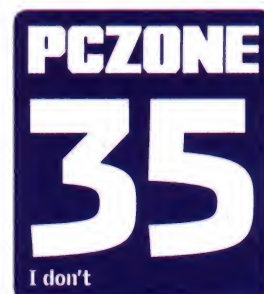
It's the extra multiplayer modes that restore some sense of jeopardy – thankfully, you're not doomed to reproduce the TV show, taking it in turns to try to win a million. You can steal questions and pass them on to other players; but this is removing the last appeal of the format, its pure simplicity.

It's hardly rocket science, but it stops being *Millionaire*, and flips into a generic, derived game with the *Millionaire* money ladder. In any event, the idea of four people huddling around a PC keyboard is an uncomfortable and desperate way to spend your winter evenings.

Without even network play, this isn't a game that belongs on a PC. Get it on

a console, by all means – but even then, party games like *Buzz* are more varied and fun, and – surprisingly – have less irritating avatars. A plug for a PS2 game in a PC mag? It feels dirty, yes, but until they bring back *You Don't Know Jack*, we've got nothing else to offer.

Jon Blyth



MAN MADE



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THE SIMS 2: FESTIVE HOLIDAY STUFF

Have an enjoyable festive period, fellow citizen



DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE
thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

System requirements 2



YOU KNOW that feeling you get when you walk into a room and feel like you've already been there? Or if you install a *Festive Holiday Stuff* content pack for *The Sims 2* and feel like you've installed something extremely similar 13 issues ago?

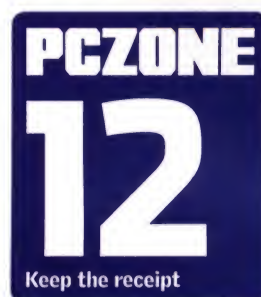
Or that odd feeling you get, the one which feels like somebody's hand has gently slipped into your pocket and is slowly removing a ten pound note – then you spin around but nobody's there? In the distance though, you can see a man sprinting away wearing a big foam costume in the shape of the EA logo...

Experience all of these feelings and more with *The Sims 2: Festive Holiday Stuff*, featuring 60 new items ranging from Christmas trees to Hanukkah candles. This *Stuff* pack is actually a repackaging of the old *Christmas Party Pack* EA put out last year (issue 164,

8%), except this time they've added 20 new festive items they seem to have somehow missed last time.

EA have been nice enough to offer the new items for a reduced price on their EA Link/Downloader service too, which handily goes right over the heads of *The Sims 2* demographic. Yes, we realise that the type of person who'd buy this content pack doesn't read this magazine, which is why the score reflects the opinions of normal people who enjoy burning down Christmas trees instead.

Steve Hogarty



HELL MARCH 2007

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

indiezone



Martin Korda presents the latest collection of indie offerings

INDIEZONE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

ROBOBLITZ

DEVELOPER Naked Sky Entertainment
WEBSITE www.robo blitz.com PRICE \$14.95 (£8)

NO, IT'S NOT a misprint, it actually is supposed to read '91%'. If you're a regular reader of these pages, you'll already know that here in indie-land, that's an unprecedented score. In fact, *RoboBlitz* – a stunning, third-person action-puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates – is our highest-scoring Indie Zone game of all time. A round of applause please.

Let's start with the visuals. Believe it or not, the engine generating *RoboBlitz*'s awe-inspiring visuals is none other than Unreal Engine 3. Yes, the very same one that's powering *UT2007*. But rather than just providing eye candy, the engine's physics capabilities have been milked like a cow at a power-lifting convention.

You play the role of Blitz, a maintenance robot on the space

cannon tasked with bringing the facility back online after a crippling pirate attack. What follows is a set of levels packed with puzzles and combat, with many tasks having multiple solutions thanks to Naked Sky Entertainment's masterful use of Unreal Engine 3's capabilities.

Some hugely imaginative weapons such as the Hover Gun – which makes objects float – and a weapon that allows you to join objects or enemies together with an elastic, electrical field, further bolster the fun factor. The sheer glee you'll feel the first time you join together two enemy units and watch them smash themselves to pieces as they try to wriggle free is sublime.

The Firework Launcher is another inspired inclusion, allowing you to send enemies flying skywards with a

technicoloured bang that'd have Guy Fawkes applauding from his grave.

With a price tag that puts many other indie games to shame, *RoboBlitz* is almost above criticism as far as indie game development goes. However, a word of warning. You're going to need a machine akin to something you'd usually associate with an underground government surveillance bunker in order to really get the most out of this.

If your 3D card is more than 18-months old and isn't at least 256MB in girth, then you'd be best advised to steer clear of this power-hungry indie behemoth. But if your machine is up to the task, then don't hesitate to snap up what is undoubtedly the best indie game we've ever had the pleasure to paw.

PCZONE
91



The Dyson of the future?



Stop hanging around.



RoboBlitz is powered by Unreal Engine 3.



Let off some steam.

NAKED WAR

DEVELOPER Zee-3 WEBSITE www.zee-3.com

PRICE Free download, \$19.99 (£11) for 20 challenge credits

IN ANY OTHER month, *Naked War* would be smugly holding aloft the much-coveted *PC ZONE* Indie Game Of The Month award, looking down at the competition with a superior sneer then leaving dismissively with three lingerie models in tow. But not this month.

However, overlook this masterful online strategy romp at your peril, because *Naked War* is a superbly crafted game, in which you and an opponent command a team of four soldiers on a variety of battlefields.

The turn-based action sees you and your rival taking turns to issue orders to your troops, then emailing them to your foe. Your ultimate goal is to blast the

opposition into submission, but don't be fooled by this simple premise, because *Naked War's* levels are packed with subtlety and variety.

With lashings of humour, colourful, well-drawn characters and locations, a great selection of vehicles, destructible terrain and a host of power-ups, you're looking at one of the most impressive indie games to date.

It may not have won this month's award, but *Naked War* can at least take solace: it'll be in our Top Five Indie Games next month.

PCZONE
85



JETJUMPER

DEVELOPER Warlock Studio WEBSITE www.warlockstudio.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

WHILE WE DO occasionally come across standout titles such as *RoboBlitz* and *Naked War*, the majority of Indie Zone's offerings are often more akin to *JetJumper*, a simplistic, visually unappealing game in which you pilot a ship over jumps, bombs and a variety of other death-inducing obstacles while collecting as many gems as you can.

What should have been a frenetic split-second, reaction-gaming lark has been hamstrung by the baffling decision to slow the gameplay down to a plodding pace that'd have a tortoise turning to *Gardeners' World* for a flash of excitement.

On three of the four difficulty levels, your vehicle chugs along like a steam-

powered tractor, while the fourth level, 'Insane', is little more than passable. It's hard not to feel that there's been a massively missed opportunity here.

Had the action been sped up, the varied levels – in which you jump chasms, avoid bombs and dodge obstacles – would have been far more entertaining. As it stands, this over-priced plodathon is probably best left alone.

PCZONE
45

Score: 1460
Level: 1-7



PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



LUGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT

www.wolfire.com
Reviewed Issue 162

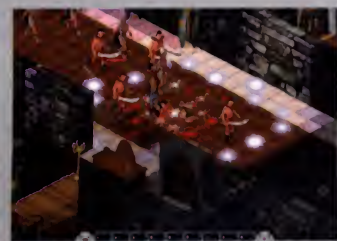
An ambitious and entertaining third-person action/adventure, in which you play Turner, a deadly, highly trained rabbit intent on avenging his murdered family. While it is a tad short, the stunning, context-sensitive combat system more than makes up for the briefness. In fact, it's worth the admission fee alone.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3

www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.



MORNING'S WRATH

www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

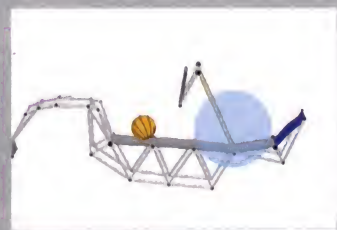
A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



FATE

www.playfate.com | Reviewed Issue 158

A compelling fantasy RPG, which takes the action RPG formula of *Diablo* and wraps it in a charismatic, cartoonish package. Oodles of depth and hours of excellent gameplay.



ARMADILLO RUN

www.armadillorun.com | Reviewed Issue 171

Physics-based puzzles have never been so much fun. Set up a mix of ramps, pulleys, catapults etc and navigate an armadillo to a specific end location. Simple, yet brilliant.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'I'

- 1 **INCUBATION**
(ISSUE 56)
- 2 **INDYCAR RACING**
(ISSUE 10)
- 3 **IL-2 FORGOTTEN BATTLES**
(ISSUE 128)
- 4 **IL-2 STURMOVIK**
(ISSUE 110)
- 5 **INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS**
(ISSUE 37)



PCZONE TOP 5 BEST BOSSES

- 1 **HITLER - WOLFENSTEIN 3D**
(ISSUE N/A)
- 2 **LECHUCK - SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND**
(ISSUE N/A)
- 3 **CYBERDEMON - DOOM**
(PCZ ISSUE 13)
- 4 **COACH OLEANDER - PSYCHONAUTS**
(PCZ ISSUE 156)
- 5 **SEPHIROTH - FFVII**
(PCZ ISSUE 66)

PCZONE TOP 5 WORST BOSSES

- 1 **DR KRIEGER - FAR CRY**
(PCZ ISSUE 140)
- 2 **NIHILANTH - HALF-LIFE**
(PCZ ISSUE 71)
- 3 **AMANDA/DEMON-THING - TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND**
(PCZ ISSUE 168)
- 4 **METAL ARMOUR-WEARING END BOSS - SOLDIER OF FORTUNE**
(PCZ ISSUE 89)
- 5 **JACK OF BLADES - FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS**
(PCZ ISSUE 160)



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2
PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY
PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outwits even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE
PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2
PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.
PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



BATTLEFIELD 2142
PCZ Issue: 174 - 86%

Adding bucketfuls of novelty mechanical future-warfare, *BF2142* pushes the *BF* formula ever closer to perfection with its exciting new game mode - despite not being revolutionary by its own merits.

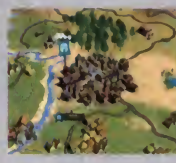
Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II
PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%

Proving that not all strategy titles have to be based upon historical or fantasy settings, this standalone sci-fi expansion offers tons of blood-spattered and frenetic action - no 12-sided die required.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS
PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Illius is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES
PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%

Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%

A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%

Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES

Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation



X3: REUNION PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%

While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWI combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%

No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



FREELANCER PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%

If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%

An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



GT2 PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%

Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%

While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%

Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%

Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3 PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%

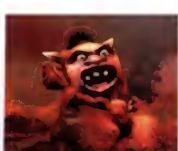
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as oxygen. With a huge collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games



THE MOVIES PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%

Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2 PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%

The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE

Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fever, making it a god among mortals.



EVIL GENIUS PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%

Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007 PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%

Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



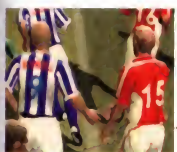
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07 PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%

EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06 PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%

Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this 06 incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.

RPGs



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%

Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%

KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%

Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%

This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%

It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

January

JADE EMPIRE: SPECIAL EDITION
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE

2K GAMES
VU GAMES

February

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY
MAELSTROM
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
TIMESHIFT
UFO: AFTERLIGHT

EIDOS
CODEMASTERS
ATARI
VU GAMES
ASCARON

March

AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES
ALONE IN THE DARK
GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2
SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL
SILENT HUNTER IV
TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE
VIRTUA TENNIS 3

EIDOS
ATARI
UBISOFT
TBA
UBISOFT
THQ
SEGA

Other possible Q1 titles...

ARMED ASSAULT
HOSPITAL TYCOON
LOTR ONLINE
HELLGATE: LONDON
PENUMBRA: OVERTURE
RESIDENT EVIL 4
SPELLFORCE 2: DRAGON STORM
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
STRANGLEHOLD
THEY HUNGER: LOST SOULS
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY
WORLD IN CONFLICT

505 GAMES
CODEMASTERS
CODEMASTERS
EA
LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT
UBISOFT
JOWOOD
THQ
MIDWAY
VALVE
EIDOS
VU GAMES



Windows Vista™

The Official Magazine

Launch
issue only

99p

It's coming...

30.01.2007

Windows Vista launches

31.01.2007

Windows Vista:
The Official Magazine launches

Find out more at www.windowstviamagazine.co.uk



PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

TFC WTF?!

AS YOU MAY know, I'm rather fond of *Team Fortress Classic* and enjoy nothing better than throwing primed grenades at people's knees while spamming 'lol nubs' in global chat.

Alas though, for my beloved pastime has suffered a steep decline in player numbers over the last few years. Top clans have split, player-run servers folded and various TFC-specific cyber tournaments have been replaced with tedious *Camperstrike* yawnfests where the entrants turn up in camo and recount phlegm-soaked tales of when they 'pwned' some nine-year-old who dared accuse them of cheating.

When Valve announced they were in the middle of developing *Team Fortress 2*, my heart skipped a beat. My love of flag rooms and sniper-infested balconies would be reborn! Only this time with more modern levels of bump mapping, adaptive tessellation and linear ocular bicubic polygrams (which anyone wanting more than 6fps would immediately turn off). The 'teaser trailer' thing looked really good and the Tex Avery cartoon slant looked splendid too.

The wind, however, was sucked in from my proverbial sails when I learned that the release date had been knocked back to the summer. Ages away!

Hopefully there won't be any more setbacks, as I don't think my mind could handle another postponement. In the meantime, you'll have to excuse me – those respawn rooms won't spam themselves...

Wand

Phil Wand, hardware editor

THE QUAD FATHER

New AMD platform aims to hit QX6800 where it hertz

THERE'S A NEW buzzword for you to learn: 'megatasking', or doing a whole bunch of crazy shit all at once. The idea is that you should be able to simultaneously rip DVDs with DeCSS, render images in Lightwave and still be able to play your FPS blockbuster, with the system staying peppy the whole while.

The Quad FX Platform aims to make 'megatasking' a viable proposition, and is AMD's dual-socket answer to Intel's quad-core QX6700 chip. Based around two 1207-pin Socket F

Athlons and sold only in packaged sets – say 'hello' to pairs of FX-70, FX-72 and FX-74 processors, running at 2.6GHz, 2.8GHz and 3.0GHz respectively – the so-called 4x4 setup offers serious bandwidth to people who feel they might need it.

Aside from more obvious questions (like, will it make iTunes any faster?), Quad FX has a number of obvious drawbacks. To begin with, it requires the development of wholly new chipsets and

new motherboards. In addition, the FX chips are last year's technology – two of them together use more electricity than your grandma's bathroom heater. They're also not demonstrably faster than the product they were designed to combat.

Then again, quad-core AMD chips due for release next year will mean the company's new Platform will play host to eight cores. As always, it's a case of staying tuned to see what becomes of it. www.amd.com



Huge bandwidth on offer but Quad FX lacks a purpose

GOLDEN AXE

New Intel motherboard flies our way

ALONG WITH IMPROVED circuitry, support for dual-channel PC2-6400 memory, CrossFire and up to three x16 graphics cards, the D975XBX2 – the 'Bad Axe 2' – is Intel's way of saying that overclocking your Core 2 Duo is what they expect you to do.

The new motherboard allows you to adjust the Extreme chip's multiplier from 6x to 20x, adjust bus frequency from 200MHz to beyond 430MHz, tickle the processor's voltage between 1.1V and 1.6V and do the

same to memory voltage. The D975XBX2 retains its predecessor's excellent layout and build quality, and should prove a hit with anyone, combining stability and durability. www.intel.com



That board from Buyer's Guide just got better.

NEWS ROUND-UP

NVIDIA promises their Vista driver will be ready just before everyone discovers they can't get their 8-Series to work with Microsoft's new operating system. So round about now then. www.nvidia.com

As for ATI and their persistently elusive R600 chip, well, the heroic new Radeon should be with us in time for my brother's birthday (he's a Pisces since you ask) and, unlike the G80, will do its thinking inside GDDR-4 memory. You can expect NVIDIA to announce a speed-hike to coincide with the ATI launch, naturally. www.ati.com

Californian memory people OCZ are making a late charge into the video card market with GeForce 8-Series cards soon. Founded just six years ago, the company quickly built a solid brand, and made successful moves into power supplies and cooling. The graphics card business is merciless but if anyone can do it, OCZ can. Factory-clocked and with a lifetime warranty please chaps. www.ocztechnology.com

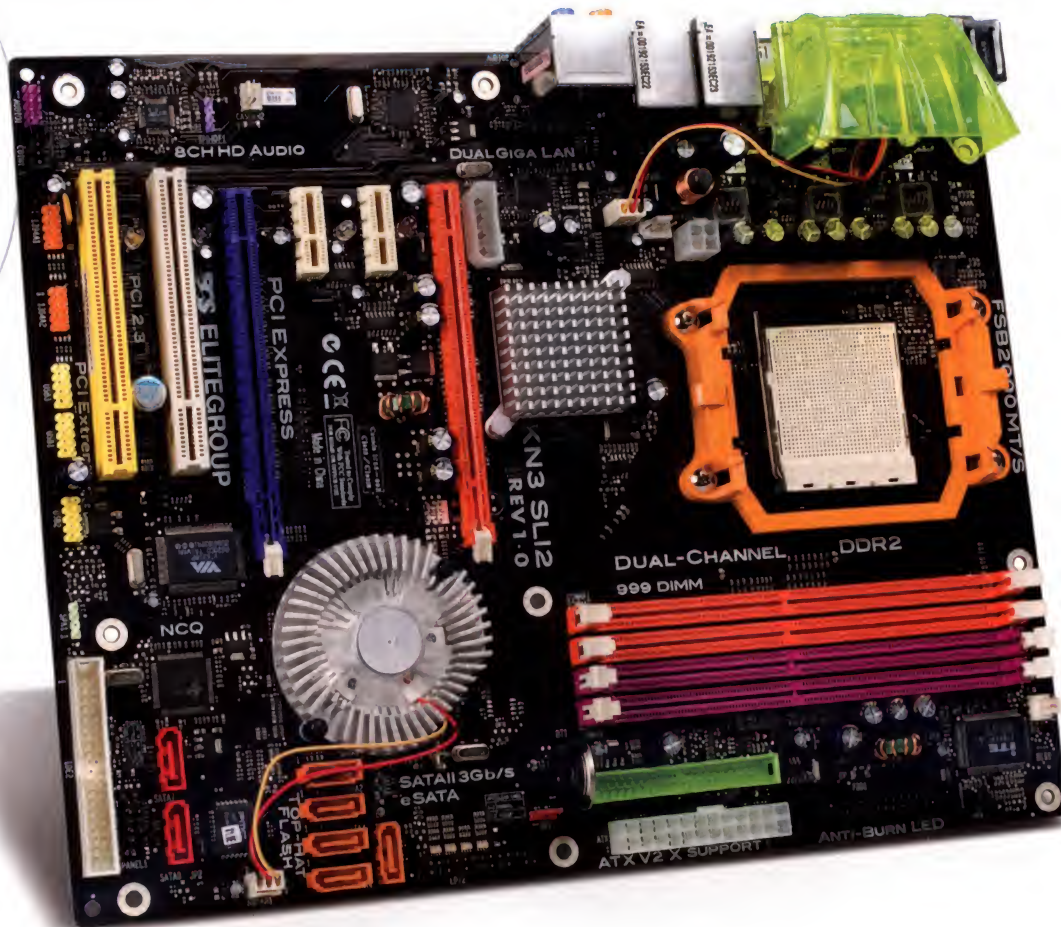
WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

BUMP MAPPING: Otherwise known as off-road cartography, the process of drawing countries and lakes and stuff while in a Land Rover. **ADAPTIVE TESSELLATION:** Changing the dangly bits at the bottoms of the curtains to make them relevant to the current situation. **HJACKTHIS:** Canned crossover movie featuring the cast of *Analyze This/That* and little known 1999 movie, *Hijack*, in which Billy Crystal fights himself. **ALUMINIUM CHIPSET COOLER:** I know the microchips/edible chips gag is weak, but this really sounds like a cooler for the edible sort. **GENIUS SLIM:** I lost eight stone in four weeks thanks to Genius Slim, it probably doesn't even have bowel-consuming worm-eggs in it!

THE COLOUR PURPLE

If you remember, the KA3 MVP from a few months back (issue 174, 83%) was the same colour as your mother's wedding hat, whereas the PX1 was a delicate shade of tightly-gripped penis. If you've ever wondered why ECS owners have naked women on their desktop wallpaper and talk too much about football, ponder no more.



ECS KN3 SLI2 EXTREME

PRICE £90 MANUFACTURER ECS WEBSITE www.ecs.com.tw

YOU CAN TELL when you've looked at too many motherboards when eight SATA ports, two IDE connectors, 16x16 SLI, onboard 7.1 audio, 32GB memory ceiling, a stack of overclocking features, three-year warranty and sub-£100 price tag take second place to what colour the PCB is.

The components still look like a Woolworths pick 'n' mix, and the brushed aluminium chipset cooler is out of keeping with its 'Extreme' designation, but at least this ECS board is no longer the wrong kind of purple. I'm delighted to report that the nForce 590-based KN3 SLI2 here has in fact been painted black, and as a result looks swish and businesslike.

The KN3 bundle has a lot of everything you might need, and a little of

the stuff you probably don't. There's a cable for the external SATA drive you don't have, plus an external breakout for an internal SATA drive to partner it, with four SATA and power splitters, plus an IDE cable. There's also an FDD cable, a rear bracket (includes front bay housing for the external USB and FireWire ports), an Ethernet crossover cable, SLI bridge and a manual that doesn't flop closed when you're not holding it. Which is great.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

If you ignore the Lego colours and whiff of budget, you'll find it hard to better the KN3's value. Push an Athlon X2 5000+ into place and you'll have a setup that, with the lid closed, is no different from the same chip running on any other nForce 590 platform.

Both the ASUS Crosshair (issue 174, 79%) and M2N32 WS Professional are almost twice the price, and yet all are indistinguishable from one another in terms of bottom-line performance. Even the Radeon Xpress 3200-based KA3 MVP conjures the same benchmark scores, although it does lack the tweak-friendly features of its NVIDIA rivals.

As always, the problem for any AMD technology is cheap Intel technology. For little more than the cost of the KN3 or KA3, the £130 Core 2 Duo E6300 offers enough overclocking headroom to get beyond 3.0GHz and put all Athlons in the shade.

If you're looking to buy a motherboard for your existing AM2 chip, take a look at the ECS. If you're starting afresh though, it'd be bonkers not to go the Intel route.

SPECIFICATION

CPU AM2 Athlon 64/X2/FX/Sempron
Chipset NVIDIA nForce 590 **Memory**
4 x Dual-channel DDR2 800/667/533
(32 GB max) **Expansion** 2 x PCI-E x16
SLI support, 2 x PCI-E x1, 2 x PCI
Audio Realtek ALC883 (7.1) **Internally**
3 x USB (6 ports), 1 x FDD, 2 x IDE (4
devices), 7 x SATA, 2 x FireWire
Externally PS/2 keyboard and mouse,
1 x Serial, 1 x SATA, 2 x LAN, 4 x USB
Warranty 36-months

PCZONE
80

GEFORCE 7600 GT

PRICE £115 MANUFACTURER PNY
WEBSITE pny-europe.com

THE GEFORCE 7600 GT isn't the most exciting card on sale, but two of them can deliver a good deal of pleasure when used in SLI.

For just over £200, you'll have a graphics setup that's not only a talking point, but your benchmark results will cause genuine trouble for some of the big boys. Trouble is, of course, that you're investing in two DirectX 9 products with full knowledge that they're both going to be obsolete by the spring.

A more urgent problem comes from the likes of BFG's GeForce 7900 GS and our favourite Radeon X1950 Pro, both of which are can be had for a whisker under £140. The sort of performance they deliver cannot be ignored – they're at the top of the mainstream ladder – and when you consider that neither are more than loose change away from this GT, the choice is an easy one.



PCZONE
72

CYCLON WEBCAM

PRICE £25 MANUFACTURER Speed Link WEBSITE speed-link.com

I WASN'T BLOWN away by the Genius Slim 320 (issue 176, 64%), so decided to look at a similarly-priced 1.3M competitor.

Sadly, the German device suffers all the same problems of its Taiwanese rival: to

start with, despite promises of 'video conferencing' support there's no integrated microphone, meaning you need extra hardware to speak with people over MSN or Skype. The cable's still not quite long enough, and the surefooted design, while sturdier and less likely to topple over than the wobbly Genius, means you can't hook it over a flat panel screen or notebook.

The picture quality isn't bad, at least for a £25 device, but I always have this nagging feeling that today's webcam technology should be able to create an image that doesn't make your world look like an aquarium played back through a 1980s VHS recorder.

Will anything better the Logitech QuickCam? I'm beginning to doubt it.



PCZONE
63

GEFORCE 7900 GTX

PRICE £380 MANUFACTURER PNY
WEBSITE pny-europe.com

IT'S GETTING ON a bit now, but the 7900 GTX is still stacked high on retailer shelves and I still get questions, with people asking me if it's a good buy.

And the answer is, yes and no. Yes, it's a good card, because it's really bloody fast: until recently, the only thing faster was the identically-priced Radeon X1950 XTX.

But no, nobody should be actually buying it. The same money gets you a faster GeForce 8800 GTS, and just a little more scores you the most mental card on sale today, the 8800 GTX. All the NVIDIA 8-series cards are DX10 parts and will make mincemeat of the games on your hard drive.

What annoys me is that vendors are not only pushing yesterday's hardware onto unwary victims, but they're also charging last year's prices for them: ASUS's 7900 GTX was £380 when I reviewed it in issue 169.



PCZONE
65

RX1950PRO-VT2D512E

PRICE £180 MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

WANT TO SPEND £150 on a new video card? Tempted by a GeForce 7900 GS or Radeon X1900 GT? Get the X1950 Pro instead.

Steady though, for the Pro is not what ATI would have you believe it is. 512MB of GDDR3 memory immediately reveals that it's not an X1950 XTX with a limp – it's more like an X1900 GT after six months with a personal trainer. One of the card's more interesting aspects is that it's the first Radeon to do away with all that CrossFire dongle bollocks, and keep the mess internal. It's now the setup it should always have been.

Performance leads the class, a little way ahead of the GeForce 7900 GS, but in this particular guise the X1950 Pro is not so compelling. It's £50 too much, it hogs two slots and the 256MB version is cheaper but without any obvious loss in power.



PCZONE
77



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Overdone it with the spray-on tan? Wife left you after you played *WOW* for 672 hours solid? Got more reindeer-embossed socks for Christmas than you know what to do with? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as necessary and system specs where applicable.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Q I'm a long-time reader, first-time writer. I love your tips and advice, and now I'm in need of your help myself. Since downloading and playing the *Warhammer: Mark Of Chaos* demo, it's become clear that my poor old 478-pin Pentium 2.8GHz isn't going to cut it – even with the Radeon X850 XT and 2GB RAM I have.

So I set myself a budget of 1,630 Euros to buy the following (I'm from Ireland, so please excuse the Euro talk): 3 x Geil DDR2 533MHz 1GB RAM, Gigabyte GA-8I945GMH-RH motherboard, 1 x E6600 Core 2 Duo CPU, 300GB Seagate SATA HD, and finally 2 x GeForce 7600 GT 256MB cards in SLI configuration.

My question to you is, is all of this a good idea? Is there anything you could recommend around the same budget that will do better? This will be my third PC bought and built by myself, and after crashing and burning on the first one and getting it a whole lot righter on the second, I've decided to ask for expert advice just to see if I'm too far from the mark.

I know there's much better out there, but at that price I'm not sure what. Please help!

Keith Walsh

A I've taken a gander at your system, and the only two things I would advise against are those two graphics cards.

Now, if I'm honest, I would say that two 7600 GTs running in tandem is the best SLI configuration available: in the right circumstances, you can wheedle out X1800 XTX-beating scores – and all for under £200. But the amazing power of the new G80 chip, together with Windows Vista, DirectX 10 – and not forgetting AMD's looming R6xx line-up (now expected in the early part of 2007, surprise) – would all dissuade me from what is essentially two value GeForce cards hewn from yesterday's technology. That is, unless you're happy to spend the same cash all over again in two or three months.

Put simply, while it's an ideal system configuration, those GTs are going to be short-lived. Although your Core 2 Duo system should prove suitably heroic – especially with a good dose of overclocking



One good reason you shouldn't be buying DX9 hardware.

– into next year and beyond, you'll want to swap out your video hardware come the spring.

In your position, I'd probably hunt around either for a Radeon X1950 Pro on offer for £145, or a GeForce 7900 GS for a smidgen less, and delay spending over £200 until we see more affordable DX10 variants on High Street shelves.

MCEWAN'S SAGA

Q I'm about to sell my PC and want to make sure that all my personal files are permanently deleted from the HDD, including all websites visited – and yes, that does include certain dubious sites containing scantily-clad women. Is there any real way of doing this, or is the only way to be sure – as Michael Biehn famously said in *Terminator* – to take a very large lump-hammer to the drive?

Jim McEwan

A Kyle Reese was right. The only guaranteed way of destroying data is to remove the hard drive and beat it with a heavy tool like a sledgehammer or Chris Moyle's. There are commercial tools which

do pretty much the same job, such as Acronis's Disk Director Suite, only you can use the drive again afterwards. However, if you don't want to lash out money – DDS is about £28 – the choice is much smaller. There are widely publicised tools such as Darik's Boot and Nuke from dban.sourceforge.net, but these are aimed at experienced users (ie, the documentation is shit).

Have a look at Hard Drive Eraser from www.killdisk.com/eraser.htm. The free version writes null data over your existing files, preventing their later resurrection by parties unknown, whereas the paid-for version performs the same task but to US DOD specifications. It'll give you total piece of mind, but it's overkill for most home users – even if your drive is full of boobies.

INDIRECT 3D

Q When I try to start my Scarface game, I get a pop-up message box with a red cross in it that says: 'scarface.exe unable to locate component. This application has failed to start because d3dx9_29.dll was not found. Re installing the app may fix this problem.' I did reinstall Scarface, but it didn't help.

Paul Graham

A You should reinstall DirectX first – d3dx9_29.dll is one of its components – and then the game. And if that doesn't help you, pay a visit to shdon.com and download the February 2006 installer from the D3DX DLLs section. That should sort you out.

DRIVER WATCH

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.11	15 NOV 06
ATI	CATALYST VISTA 6.11.0001	2 NOV 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE V171	2 NOV 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE V171 FOR VISTA	11 OCT 06

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 5.09.0007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 5.11.0000	19 OCT 06
CREATIVE	FORCEWARE V171	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIDY 4.20.00016	11 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIDY FOR VISTA 4.23.00016	



Disk Director Suite includes a Wipe feature.

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Kyle Reese was right. The only guaranteed way of destroying data is to remove the hard drive and beat it with a heavy tool like a sledgehammer or Chris Moyles"

But there is some software that might work nearly as well, Jim McEwan will be pleased to know

BUY IT NOW

Q I bought a Dell 8300 in April 2003 and I feel that the time has well and truly come to get a new PC. I would not attempt to build one myself because I feel I would balls it up. Is now a good time or not to buy a new PC? With Vista around the corner, should I wait until it's released – will it make a difference? I heard that not all old games will be compatible with Vista?

I have about 3,300 Euros to spend, and plan on ploughing it into the graphics card and a Core 2 Duo. If now is not a good time, then when will be? I really do want to get a new PC to enjoy some of the great games coming out at the moment.

Cairbre O'Donnell

A Now is not a good time to buy a ready-built system. Any mainstream Dell you buy will come shipped with a lousy excuse for a graphics card as standard, or a half-reasonable card you could buy much cheaper elsewhere.

For example, if you configure a new Dell 9200 with a GeForce 7950 GX2, it will cost you £411 over and above whatever inflated price you're already paying for the system's standard Radeon. Since you can buy GX2s online for under £375, it's nothing more than a waste of your money – customise your system only to save money. And don't

forget that large corporations are not interested in you once they have your money: with few exceptions, their after-sales support is beneath contempt.

I'd do nothing yet. I realise your huge wedge of Euros must be shouting louder every day, but it's really not worth it. That money will buy a truly gorgeous quad-core, DirectX 10, Vista Premium powerhouse early in the new year, so sit on your money for now.

TANDEM GEFORCE

Q Can you put my mind at rest? I recently upgraded to a GeForce 7950 GX2. My main concern is that it wasn't cheap and to be honest, I'm far from being blown away by it. Have I made a mistake in buying a CrossFire motherboard (an ASUS P5W DH), or am I still getting the card's full potential?

I've set it up via the control panel to use both GPUs, but after reading your review last issue, I was left a little confused. I understand the RAM totals 1GB, but running DXDIAG it only shows up as 512MB. Am I not using the whole card when playing games? Do I need special drivers?

Chris Gray

A You should not have any trouble running GX2 on the P5W. The card is reported as 512MB by DXDIAG because that's just the way SLI works: regardless of total memory, you're never going to be pushing more data than one card can handle. In short, your GX2 still has a 512MB memory space and will report as such.

In addition, you don't need to worry about making your games know how to talk to your card, because the standard NVIDIA drivers do that for you. Visit www.slizone.com and click the SLI Optimized Games link to see which titles work out of the box with the GX2 – there are presently more than 350 of them.

Lastly, the GX2 is ideally suited to high resolutions. You're only going to be properly blown away when you start running things above 1280x1024. **PCZ**



To add a second GX2 to the XPS 700 pushes the cost over £3,000.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

HijackThis - v1.99.1

Below are the results of the scan. Be careful what you delete. HijackThis cannot determine what is bad and what merely customized by you. The best thing to do is save a log file and show it to knowledgeable folks.

☐ R1 - HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Search Bar = http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=69157

☐ R1 - HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Default_Page_URL = http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=69157

☐ R1 - HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Default_Search_URL = http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=69157

☐ R1 - HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Search Page = http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=69157

☐ R0 - HKLM\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Start Page = http://go.microsoft.com/fwlink/?LinkId=69157

☐ R1 - HKCU\Software\Microsoft\Internet Explorer\Main,Window Title = Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by evesham.com

☐ O2 - BHO: Adobe PDF Reader Link Helper - {0689E9F0-C8D7-4D59-B87D-784B7D6B0E03} - C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 2.0\Adobe Reader\AdobePDFHelper.dll

☐ O2 - BHO: SSVHelper Class - {761497BB-D6F0-462C-B6EB-D40AF1D92D43} - C:\Program Files\Java\jre1.5.0_09\bin\ssv.dll

☐ O2 - BHO: Adobe PDF Conversion Tool Helper - {AE7CD045-E861-484F-8273-0445EE161910} - C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 2.0\Adobe Reader\AdobePDFConversionToolHelper.dll

☐ O2 - BHO: Windows Live Toolbar Helper - {B0B1DAD-C946-4A17-ADC1-6485B4FF55D0} - C:\Program Files\Windows Live Toolbar\WindowsLiveToolbarHelper.exe

☐ O3 - Toolbar: Adobe PDF - {47833539-D0C5-4125-9FAB-0819E2EAA933} - C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 2.0\Adobe Reader\AdobePDFToolbar.dll

☐ O3 - Toolbar: Windows Live Toolbar - {B0B1DAD-C946-4A17-ADC1-6485B4FF55D0} - C:\Program Files\Windows Live Toolbar\WindowsLiveToolbarHelper.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [CTSysVol] C:\Program Files\Creative\SBAudio\225\Surround Mixer\CTSysVol.exe /r

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [CTDDet] C:\Program Files\Creative\SBAudio\225\Surround Mixer\CTDDet.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [CTHelper] C:\Program Files\Creative\SBAudio\225\Surround Mixer\CTHelper.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [SBRvDet] C:\Program Files\Creative\SBAudio\225\Surround Mixer\CTDDet.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [UpdReg] C:\WINDOWS\UpdReg.EXE

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [RoxioDragToDisc] C:\Program Files\Roxio\Easy Media Creator 7\Drag to Disc\DragToDisc.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [BigDogPath] C:\WINDOWS\VM_STI.EXE BenQ Web Camera

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [SunJavaUpdateSched] C:\Program Files\Java\jre1.5.0_09\bin\jusched.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [AVG7_CC] C:\PROGRA~1\Grisoft\AVGFree\avgcc.exe /STARTUP

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [iTunesHelper] C:\Program Files\iTunes\iTunesHelper.exe

☐ O4 - HKLM\...\Run: [QuickTime Task] C:\Program Files\QuickTime\qttask.exe -atboottime

Scan & fix stuff

No naughtiness here!

19 HIJACKTHIS

COSTS FREE

FROM www.spywareinfo.com/~merijn

The trouble with the average PC user nowadays is that they tend to blindly accept whatever programs they have perched in their system memory, not even stopping to question disingenuous processes like W2006L0L.DLL or SYSTAM23.EXE. In an age of phishing and all-round cyber mischief, it's reassuring to know that there are some freeware software tools out there determined to liberate your average Joe from unscrupulous Russians.

HijackThis is incredibly simple in design, yet can wreak havoc on your PC if used irresponsibly. It is, essentially, a wizard-driven front-end for the Windows Registry, so you're best advised to back everything up prior to starting your rampant clickfest.

A quick scan of your system will give a breakdown of memory-resident processes and potentially bad registry keys. The rest is up to you: spyware removal is an art-form in itself, but when used in conjunction with your favourite search engine, HijackThis is an incredibly powerful piece of software. Step through the checklisted results, querying anything you don't recognise; you'll find that there are thousands of like-minded Internet users out there, all trying to collectively kick unwelcome Trojans in the bollocks.

Once you've placed checkmarks against the naughty entries, simply confirm that you wish them to be vanquished and HijackThis does the rest. Reboot your PC with a large cartoonish grin on your face and bask in the warmth and glory of a cleansed PC. You deserve it.

FORUMS:

DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Q: (StarMan70) Looking for some advice on which of these is the better deal? BFG GeForce 7600 GS AGP 512MB DDR2 Core Clock 420MHz £113.00; or INNO3D GeForce 7600 GS AGP 256MB GDDR2(?) Core Clock 400MHz £78.71? Is the extra RAM and increased clock speed worth the extra £35? Thanks in advance. **A:** (Tetras) If you can't afford the jump to a 7600 GT, then get the INNO3D. 512MB of RAM is wasted with a 7600 GS. **A:** (Wandy) The 7600 GT is a superior card and shouldn't cost you much more than the largely pointless 512MB GS variant.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Please remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

WATCHDOG

Not all companies are bad – but if they are, write to us for help...

KONAMI

THE ACCUSED: Konami

PROBLEM: Dire PES6 servers

As a committed *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* player on PC, reader Steve Cowin was always a bit disappointed with the slow servers and looked forward to the next iteration being a big improvement.

Sadly, when *PES6* finally arrived, Steve only managed to clock up a distinctly unimpressive 10 minutes online over four days, getting unceremoniously dumped from the server every time he tried to play. It's not just the humble PC either – apparently all formats are equally affected.

Steve says: "It takes hours to get online and when you do, you get kicked out

before playing a game." A case of foul play if ever we heard one.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: As adverts for our hallowed magazine were dotted around the pitch, we set out straight away to find out what was going on. Two weeks after our initial contact with Konami, they returned to us with this statement.

"Following the sporadic problems users of *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* have experienced

with the game's online modes, Konami has made major improvements to its servers to ensure an improved online experience for PlayStation 2 and PC users." While some console owners still seem to be experiencing problems, it's good to know that Konami have pulled their finger out and solved the problem on PC at least.

FINAL VERDICT: Servers improved and online matches now working.



Steve managed to clock up a distinctly unimpressive 10 minutes online over four days



THE ACCUSED: Pipex

PROBLEM: Incorrect broadband billing
Reader Phil Monks signed up for Pipex 1Mbit broadband in August 2005, but two months later he realised that Pipex hadn't billed him.

"Not wanting this to mount up to a huge bill next time I needed tech support, I got in touch with Pipex and pointed out their error. Pipex told me I wouldn't have to pay for the months I was not originally billed for. I thought this was very generous of Pipex and so I went on my merry way."

However, a year down the line, Phil decided he could get a better deal elsewhere. He contacted Pipex at the end of August 2006 to inform them of his decision but thought he should mention the 'free months' incident, in case they thought that he hadn't been with them for the required 12 months. Pipex assured him they were aware and that he wouldn't be charged an early cancellation fee.

However, in September, he discovered that Pipex had taken £82.19 from his account. "Assuming this was a migration/

cancellation fee, I got in touch with Pipex around Oct 6. The person I spoke to confirmed this money had been taken in error, and also confirmed that the money would be refunded within two weeks."

Two weeks later, and still without his money, Phil got in contact with Pipex who confirmed that he'd have his money within 14 days. But the next day, he received an email from them stating that the early cancellation fee was correctly charged as, according to their system, he hadn't been with them for a year. (Groan...)

Phil responded by ringing up the finance department but they wouldn't budge. He reckons: "Since I was told before I migrated that I would pay no fee, I do not feel I should have had to pay this charge. If I'd been told I'd be liable to pay a fee, I would not have migrated away."

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Ah, it's the old broadband gem again. Trying to get to the bottom of the matter, we spoke to Pipex to see what they had to say.

"Pipex would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused to Mr Monks. Mr Monks' Pipex broadband service was activated on the 10/10/05 and, in accordance with Mr Monks' contract,

any cancellation within the 12-month minimum period of service would incur a fee of £58.75.

"Mr Monks requested a migration authorisation code on 29/08/06. In accordance with his contract, 30 days notice must be given in order to close a Pipex account during which time the service will continue. Mr Monks made 10 payments in addition to one month of

service free of charge. Therefore, one month's payment was due to prevent the cancellation charge.

"Unfortunately, both payments were charged simultaneously. A refund has been processed and should be received within 10 working days." **FINAL VERDICT:** Money refunded, account shut down and cancellation fee avoided – eventually. **PCZ**



LIMITED EDITION

SAM FISHER'S CHOICE

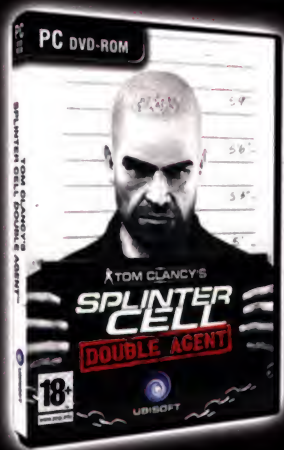


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CELL**
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PC WORLD
The Computer Superstore

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO
GOOD IF YOU'VE
GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Did Santa leave a roll of crisp tenners in your stocking? Then read this page carefully...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

X1900 XTX

EXPECT TO PAY £371

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

PAY £790

MAN Intel

WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY

£155

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY

£175

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY

£250

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY

£140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY

£195

MANUFACTURER

Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

RADEON X1950 PRO

EXPECT TO PAY £130

MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT – the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY

£126

MANUFACTURER

Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Allendale E6300 might be a stripped-down Conroe, but don't wrinkle your nose: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £65

MANUFACTURER

ASRock

WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY

£41

MANUFACTURER

Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY

£142

MANUFACTURER

ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time, 1280x1024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games too.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY

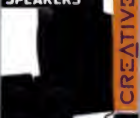
£32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY

£37

MANUFACTURER

Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

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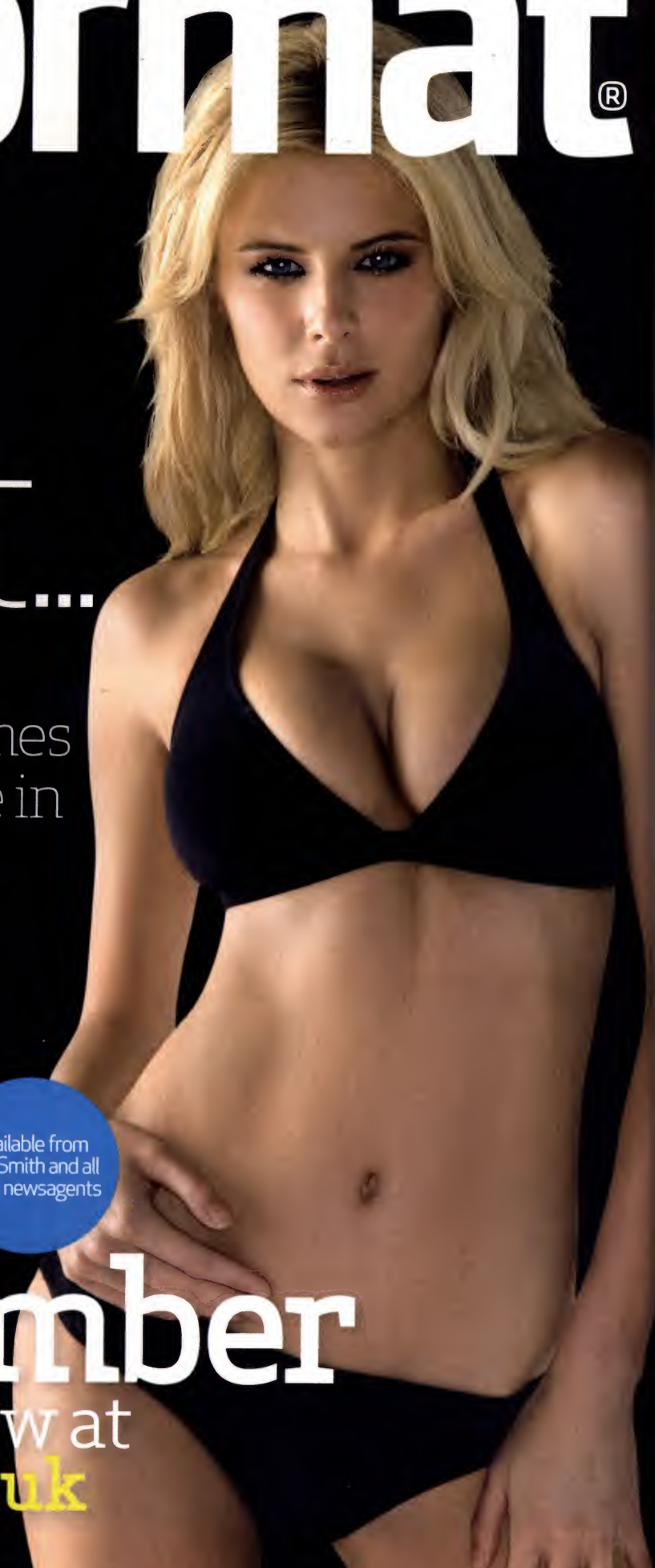
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PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

FREE GAMES!

Buy, buy, buy

A NYBODY PLAYED *Counter-Strike: Source* lately? I did, and I was sickened to discover this appalling new variable pricing thingy they've added to the buy menu. Instead of every weapon having a fixed price, the whole thing works on a rickety stock market-style system. God knows how it works, or if there are teams of virtual stockbrokers shouting into imaginary phones and buying fictitious AK-47s with fake money before throwing themselves out of made-up windows because the price just plummeted.

All this economical mucking about means that, when I played at least, the best weapons cost upwards of \$6,000. That means you've got to win two games (or lose about eight) before you can have the best load-out. I don't know about you, but if I was spending that much virtual money, I'd rather retire to a virtual island and sit on some shares in Kevlar vests rather than risk getting shot in the streets.

Steve Hogarty

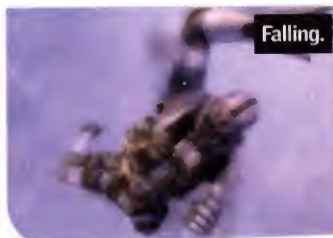
Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

Abaddon dance



Fight your way up to the very final boss in *Guild Wars: Nightfall*, but instead of engaging in an epic battle with him, have a bit of a dance instead. This pleases Abaddon, and he will dance with you for a moment before consuming your soul.



Falling.

102 Demo Pages

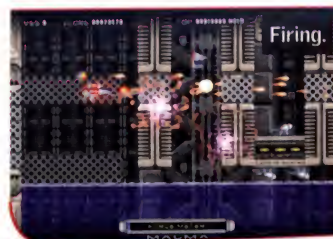
Try out the latest games right now!



Flying.

104 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Firing.

106 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Freeing.

108 Play!

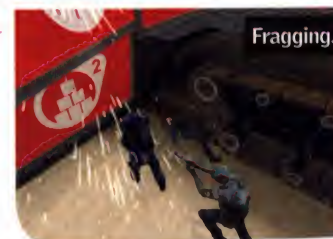
Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Fearing.

112 Battlefield 2142

Rise through the ranks with our handy play guide!



Fragging.

115 Fight Club

Did you win or did we lose? Find out inside!

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

281.9
HOURS*

Demos

On the DVD – free games galore!



Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

SAM & MAX: EP 1 CULTURE SHOCK

The dynamic duo return www.telltalegames.com

IF HOURS WERE little purses, you'd only have to unclasp three or four to finish *Sam & Max: Episode 1 - Culture Shock*. It's a thin slice of gaming, but more densely packed with the fruit of good humour than the most delicious of wedding cakes. It may take as long to play as watching the Academy Award-winning Ben Kingsley in *Gandhi*, but there are loads more jokes and far less of all that preachy stuff about non-violence.

Obviously, this demo is going to be even shorter than the game. To continue the cake metaphor, it's like someone's flicked a delicious and uncomplicated raisin into your mouth, and you didn't quite have a chance to enjoy it before you reflex-swallowed. It does, however, give you the perfect flavour of the full game, and the opportunity for Freelance Police virgins to dip their elbows into... The cake.

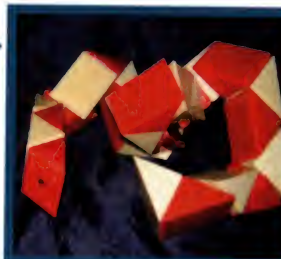
Every click is rewarded with a wisecrack, and every puzzle is rooted in good, old-fashioned mirth. It's not too

difficult, but it is the kind of adventure that made you want to make games for a living, because you imagined a bunch of lovely people just having an amazing time with their lives.



SWISS CHEESE

Curiously enough, after you solve the cheese quandary, you deal with the rat by brute force and threats. Sod the cerebral approach – sometimes you just want to throw things out of windows. Especially rodents in flat-caps.



RUBIK'S SNAKE

Well, calling this a puzzle is a bit much, really. It was just a twistable strip of cheap plastic that you could turn into a dog, or indeed a snake. Certainly not as good as Rubik's Magic, or that one that was shaped like a cube.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST PUZZLES And we've solved them all...



WHAT IS WIND?

Wind is caused by differing air pressures. However, medieval knights thought it was god trumping, and would put pegs on their helmets and say: "Forsooth, 'tis right breezy out, methinks 'twas sprouts for tea in heaven."



WHERE DO BROKEN HEARTS GO?

Whitney Houston thought they might go home to the open arms of a love that's waiting there. We know now she was talking drug-rubbish, and that broken hearts can be found in grit boxes on roadsides.

SPLINTER CELL: SINGLE-PLAYER

Acrobat Sam Fisher has divided loyalty, legs www.splintercell.com

BEING A DOUBLE agent is hard work, as anyone who's had two instant messenger windows open at the same time will know. Who hasn't accidentally incriminated themselves by typing in the wrong chat window? "OMG I'm talking to stupid smelly Steve in another window. I hope he never finds out I put gravy in his aquarium," – that sort of thing.

If that happened to Sam Fisher, he wouldn't log off and never use the Internet again. He'd rappel through the chat window and hide under your desk. And that's how much we recommend you install this demo.



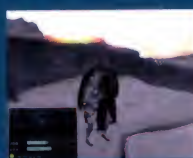
FISHER OF MANY TALENTS

A skip, a flip, a gun to the tit



PARACHUTE

This high-altitude parachute jump is the single most perilous situation that you'll ever find yourself in that can be fixed by tapping the space bar once. Don't try the same tactic next time you're getting mugged.



CRASH AND CARRY

Having just shot this man to death, we're performing our traditional victory dance, which involves carrying him around like a sack of potatoes and laughing. After that, we'll drop him down a hole or something.

SPLINTER CELL: MULTIPLAYER

Cells become less splintered www.splintercell.com

THE MULTIPLAYER VERSION of *Double Agent* is so far removed from a simple deathmatch that it deserves its own space on this page. Up to six players play at once, three as stealthy acrobatic spies, and three as Upsilon squad – great clumsy heifers who can't even jump onto boxes.

You could put it as simply as 'the spies have to hack the posts on the map, the mercenary squad have to kill the spies', but that doesn't do justice to the stealth, gadgetry and viewing tools at each side's disposal. It's one of the most clever and underrated multiplayer games out there.



1 This is the red console, to be hacked by the spies. Four to defend, three mercenaries in each team – there's always going to be one left unattended...

2 Ladies don't sweat, they glow. When terrorists run, it sets off sensors in the Upsilon's kit, making them glow. Like big sweaty ladies.

3 There's no great collection of guns – it's not that sort of game. You can grab people around the neck and put them to sleep though, which is some consolation.

HACK ATTACK

They got the skills you lack



WHOOPS-ILON

In this grab, you can see how Steve's spy is holding a knife to my throat. The things I'm imagining him whisper are terrifying.



NOT QUITE ALONE IN THE DARK

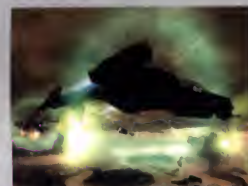
Even though you've got a torch, you're going to have to learn to embrace the darkness like a bad goth lyric.

THE BEST OF THE REST



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

It's been a good year for strategy, what with *Company Of Heroes* and this hard drive-molesting 15th century whopper. May I make so bold as to suggest you install the blighter, then fetch me my pipe? www.totalwar.com



BATTLEFIELD 2142

In only 136 years, we'll be flying around in mechs and Titans and billboards will read our minds and tell us what to buy. It's the future, and if you don't like it, why don't you go and live in the 18th century? battlefield2142.ea.com



GOthic 3

The teutonic RPGs that just don't stop getting better. If the trend upwards continues, *Gothic 5* will be so agonisingly good that it will break your heart to play it. And number three's not bad, either. www.gothic3.com



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

Playing football is a terrible idea. Watching football is a bit better, but it's still a bit needless. Football is only acceptable when you're not running, and the people on the pitch aren't real. And that's why PES is OK by us. www.pesjunkies.com



WAR FRONT: TURNING POINT

www.war-front.com



There are many great mysteries in life, like why do your toes grow hair and just how did David Hasselhoff get so popular? If you've ever wondered what would have happened had Hitler been assassinated, then check out this multiplayer RTS demo.

CRYSIS DIRECTX 10 FLYOVER

www.crysis-online.com



Feeling a bit like a tropical holiday advert, *Crysis'* new video is stunning stuff. Running under DirectX 10, the video shows off underwater scenes (including a shark), gorgeous lapping waves and even a glimpse of an alien artifact.

SNIPPETS



CHA-CHUNG

www.secondlifeinsider.com/
2006/11/25/anshe-chung-
millionaire/

Much mainstream media wankery has been spouted recently about the first person to earn a million dollars in an MMO. Anshe Chung bought plots of land in *Second Life* before using 'employees' of an 'undisclosed wage' in 'China' to develop them and sell them on.



DIRTBIKE MOD

battlefield2.filefront.com/file/
Dirt_Bike_Mod_Addon;72242
In the absence of *Project Reality*, we suggest getting your dirtbike thrills from this *Battlefield 2* mod. It's on the DVD, and it lets you jump on bikes and zip around maps in single-player. A warning though – as the world of *Battlefield* exists in a horrible soulless vacuum, you might not feel the wind in your hair.



BOOK OF REVELATIONS

EVE Online: Revelations reveals itself with astonishing disclosure www.eve-online.com

ANOTHER MASSIVE EXPANSION for *EVE* will have arrived by the time you read this very sentence, tearing towards the light of day with a great ripping warp sound.

Of the many new features being introduced, things like the ability to discover new systems, the obligatory addition of eight new regions and the chance to salvage material from space wreckage seem the most interesting

additions. A full feature-list can be found on the game's website. It's a big trump in the face of MMOs which would normally charge for updates.

Similarly, Blizzard have updated *World Of Warcraft* to include all of the new features that *The Burning Crusade* will introduce, sans, of course, the expansion-exclusive content. Weighing in at over 600MB, it's the most extensive update Azeroth has ever seen.

RAILROAD TYCOON NOW FREE!

www.2kgames.com/railroads

PARDON ME BOY, is the Chattanooga choo choo? If you cannot answer this simple question then maybe you should piss right off, because Sid Meier, in his capacity as the god of all trains, has made *Railroad Tycoon* absolutely free to download for ardent trainaholics. Even if you're not addicted to trainahol, you're positively encouraged to check our DVD, install the tiny old game and

discover the wonders of choo choos and their Chattanooga origins.

Perhaps after playing this game and becoming suitably addicted, you might wonder how to satiate that screaming voice inside you that screams the word 'train' endlessly – maybe you'll buy *Sid Meier's Railroads!*. Wait, this is just a big train-flavoured play isn't it? Sid Meier, you little rascal! Oh but we do love you so.



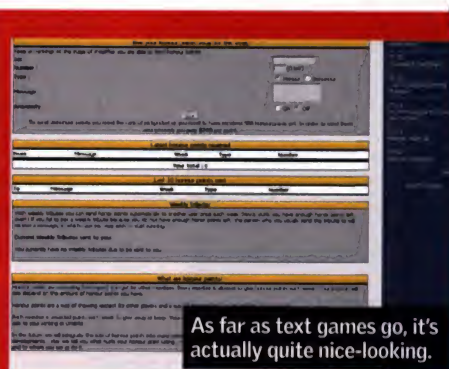
Before coastal erosion, it was all at right angles y'see.

Train Report: Charlottesville & Richmond R.R.		
Train class/route	Revenue: YTD	Last Year
1) Local/Cha->Ric Richmond Zephyr	\$ 17,000	\$ 16,000 (6 mph)
2) Local/ChJ-Cha-Ric->Cha	\$ 12,000	\$ 37,000 (mph)

So exciting, we might just vomit.



Space will remain as dusty as ever.



As far as text games go, it's actually quite nice-looking.



NOT THE SOPRANOS

Play Omerta or they'll break your knees

www.barafranca.com

MAFIA TYPES TAKE themselves a bit too seriously. It's always 'The Don' this, or 'Omerta' that – they never take the time to unwind and play MMO games. But if they did, they'd probably play *Omerta*, a massively multiplayer text-based free online gangster RPG. That, or *World Of Warcraft*, we reckon.

Omerta, owing to its complete lack of moving imagery with which to

represent itself, is entirely free. The aim is to work your way up through one of many Mafia families to become The Don, before sitting around in big leather chairs and scaring people with your presence. With 1.7 million people subscribed (an unknown percentage of which have since died or stopped playing), it's right up there with books and reading *PC ZONE* on the list of fun things to do involving text.

SNIPPETS



EN-CYCLOPS-AEDIA

www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/encyclopedia
There might not even be a cyclops in *World Of Warcraft*, but there is now an extensive encyclopaedia chronicling the history of *Warcraft*, the universe, its residents and all the crazy things they've been doing since time began. Something to read while auto-running through the Barrens we suppose.



DELL ISLAND

slurl.com/secondlife/Dell%20Island/170/77/24/
Mass-market PC manufacturer Dell has hewn Dell Island from the virtual stone of *Second Life*. On this magical island you can buy Dell products and visit a Dell Museum. Can you contain your excitement? We cannot!

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
GOTHIC 3



v1.09 means the "sun doesn't shine through mountains and buildings anymore".



I KNOW NOTHING...



We speak with Kevin De Smet, the fella who designed that *Fawcett Towers* map for *Counter-Strike: Source* (see page 110)

PCZ: So, why exactly did you choose to base a map on *Fawcett Towers*?

KDS: "I'd just finished my previous map and I was thinking what to do next. In the evenings I'd occasionally unwind with an episode of *Fawcett Towers* – seeing Basil running up and down the stairs really made me think... What if that were a pack of infiltrating CTs? I asked around on servers and forums as to whether players themselves wanted to see this and got very positive responses overall. So I went ahead and did it – and it turned out great."

PCZ: How did you map the building out – did you study each episode?

KDS: "Definitely. I've never been a huge *Fawcett Towers* fan per se and only know of the show from my dad. As such, I had little knowledge of most of the hotel. I knew it had tons of windows everywhere, making for lots of entry and exit points, and that was one of the key reasons I wanted to do this map – the unrestrictive nature of the building. The map took shape very slowly – I built the exterior of the

hotel first, then the interiors and adjusted the exterior accordingly."

PCZ: Have you tried to make the letters on the sign arrange themselves into crude phrases?

KDS: "Yes, but in the end I found no way to do this without being too taxing, so it was a compromise I was willing to make. Since you can shoot the letters off, that's a nice enough alternative and much easier requirement-wise."

PCZ: What's your favourite reference to the TV show in the map?

KDS: "The deflated blow-up doll: it only appears in one episode for about three seconds, so it's easily overlooked. It's something for real fans, or people who've worked on recreating the thing for over 200 hours."

PCZ: How many Manuel quotes are hidden in there?

KDS: "There are about five sound files, and a good chunk of those are used at the back of the hotel. Try to jump onto the

crates or shed and go outside the map – he'll have something to say about that!"

PCZ: Any plans to add some Basil and Manuel skins?

KDS: "That would be great, but sadly I'm not much of a skinner. If someone feels up for it though, I'd love that. Initially, I wanted the cast to be the hostages and have them have different behaviours too (Manuel being slow and scared, for example), but it would have been a tremendous amount of additional work. The hostages are now guests, so that's nearly as good."



Movie of the month

HUXLEY

Once, for a laugh, Webzen dressed a St Bernard up in a detective trenchcoat and a detective hat, before giving it a dog collar with 'Huxley The Incredible Crime-Solving Dog' printed on it. By the time they'd started to force a pipe into its mouth it was already dead. Huxley is now buried beneath Webzen's floorboards.



THWACKO! A passing ship smashes right into the player's face! Brilliant!



Infrared! It's not 'infared', as some people might think. Huxley's got it.



This guy looks particularly enamoured with the camera being so close to him.



"OK, the first person to ask 'how are your forearms?' dies."



Freeware



Steve Hogarty offers free fun fairly frequently, friends

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month, shoot from left to right with *ProtoType*, shoot from bottom to top with *G-Force*, shoot in nice big circles with *Orbit*, and click things with the other two...

PROTOTYPE

Borrowing is the sincerest form of flattery... Dev: X-Out | xout.blackened-interactive.com/ProtoType.html



IS IT R-TYPE? If I take 'poto' out of the title, does it become 'R-Type'? Wasn't the ship in *R-Type* the first non-prototype version of its kind? Well yes, *ProtoType* is an *R-Type*-inspired horizontal shooter, and one which came first in the Shmup-Dev 'Horizontal Shooter With Boss' competition. It also unashamedly references *R-Type* at every turn.

And rightly so: *R-Type* clones are a genre to themselves, and *ProtoType* not only matches the classic shooter's intense gameplay, it also adds some flavour of its own. Flying from left to right across a scrolling level, the game sees you blasting through waves of enemy ships, often in space, often in water, and often inside of bigger ships which require you to avoid the various ceilings, floors and walls.

Weapon upgrades are made available through mindless blasting away at certain types of enemies, and these upgrades offer increased fire power, rail guns, plasma cannons and all sorts of offensive rightward energy-dispensing methods.

It's a complete bitch to play though, and even the easiest difficulty setting will



ProtoType not only matches the classic shooter's intense gameplay, it also adds some flavour of its own



have you chewing the edges of your keyboard with frustration and fostering a hatred of all scrolling things, be they LED screens or lengthy word documents.

R-Type was always about finding the best (or only) way through a level, and so *ProtoType* is a perfect clone. Enemies often come from all directions, and as they fly in patterns, the only way to avoid death is to sit in a safe spot until you can move forward. So you see why it won then.



BJ C5: LOTRD

Read on for the full title...

Grundislav Games | www.grundislavgames.com/benjordan

BEN JORDAN CASE 5: Land Of The Rising Dead (damn this infernally thin column) is a point-and-click adventure built with the lovely Adventure Game Studio. In it, you play Ben Jordan, who's investigating his fifth paranormal case. It's this eponymous case that leads him to Japan and a string of infamous ghost murders which have claimed four lives.

The reason they're ghost murders is because of the lack of evidence at the scene of each crime (reason enough to assume ghosts are responsible), and standard point-and-click item-based puzzlers applies.

There are some classically obscure objects to pick up too, the first being someone else's bathrobe. The dialogue is well written, the music is pleasing and the storyline is coherent enough to keep you playing.

PILOT LIGHT

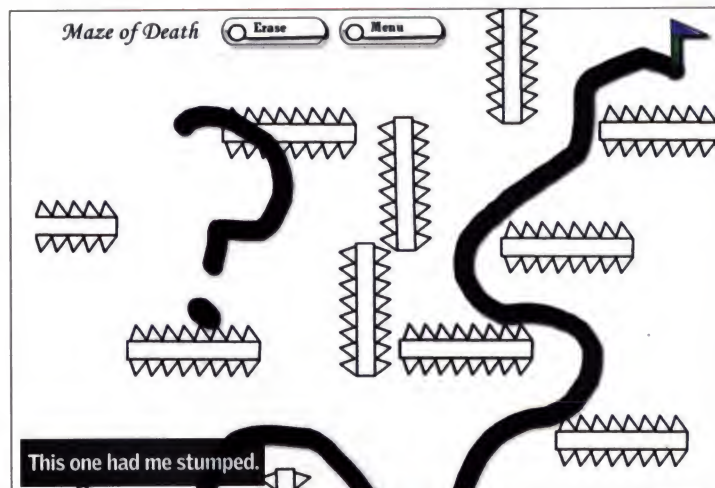
Don't let it go out now

Dev: Brendon Chung | blended.planethalflife.gamespy.com/pilot/



THIS MAY WELL be one of the shortest point-and-click adventures around (if you want something with a bit more girth, check out Ben Jordan on the opposite page). However, it's got lots of charm, and as people with small penises often say: it's not the length which counts, but the art style and humour.

You're an interplanetary delivery person, on a mission to deliver a parcel and overcome the various obstacles impeding your progress. It's routine stuff, but it's funny and only about ten minutes long. What's more, this is supposedly Episode 1, so you can expect a sequel. Hooray for that.



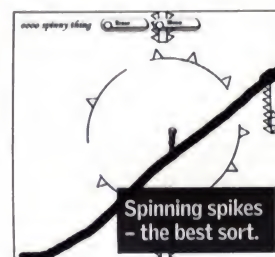
DRAW PLAY

Put mouse to mousemat

Dev: Game Gecko | www.gamegecko.com/drawplay.php

NOW THAT GAMING'S going all post-modern, here's a platformer webgame which allows you to draw the platforms yourself. Mario was Italian, so was Michelangelo, so it was inevitable the two would come together at some point – and this is the bastard son of their meeting.

It starts off easy enough, as these things do, with a simple ramp up to a flag. It then becomes increasingly difficult (shockingly), with obstacles to avoid and spinning spikes and stuff. It's a tad glitchy sometimes, but a clever idea nonetheless. It also reminds us of that great mini-game in *WarioWare Touched!*



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

ORBIT



Dev: Eminence Host
www.2dplay.com/orbit/orbit.swf

Thrilled by the fact that gravity is a universal constant, things like moons and satellites regularly enjoy a good spin around their larger counterparts, who never act superior even though they are of greater mass. In celebration of this heart-warming relationship between orbiters and orbitees, here's *Orbit*, a webgame which rather depressingly portrays the inevitability of our planet's demise.

You take a small round object and launch it in such a way that it remains in flight around the screen and avoids crashing into any of the planets, which become more numerous the further you progress. With one planet, it's easy. But when you have to avoid seven or eight of the things it becomes a matter of trial and more trial. To be perfectly honest you won't want to play much further than level eight, if you even get that far.

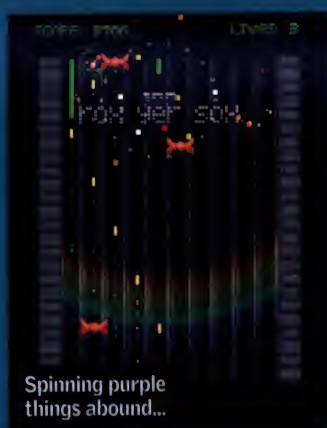
G-FORCE

After F, before H

Dev: Oddbob | www.retroremakes.com/forum2/showthread.php?p=104573

EVEN THOUGH IT'S lacking in two crucial *Tempest* dimensions, the one that makes it look 3D and the one that makes the track you play on loop around itself (at least in the earlier levels), *G-Force* is a brilliant remake of the classic blaster. It's still at demo stage and it's sickeningly difficult to play, but it's a rock-solid shooter.

Enemies flow forth from the top of the screen, coming from that great big cache of bad guys who tend to exist just out of sight in these sorts of games. From there, they make their way down to the bottom of the screen, and your mission is to prevent this from happening – don't ask why, it seems to be the case that



enemies don't belong at the bottom.

The sound effects are spot-on, it's got a lovely techno soundtrack to annoy the elderly, and it includes the obligatory super-zapper recharge, as well as Jeff Minter-eque crude humour. Also, we're cruelly judging it while it's still in development because we're evil like that.





ROCK 24

Rock 24 is a hard place. *Steve Hogarty* just loves being stuck there...

mods.moddb.com/7917 | Mod for: Half-Life 2

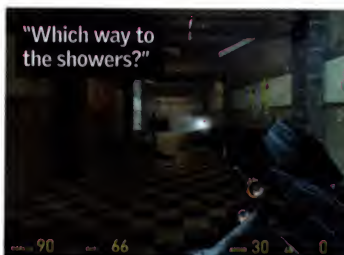
THE LIFE OF some mods begin with one man, aged between 12-32, drawing a slightly too homoerotic knight or alien or something before making a Wikipedia entry about it and fruitlessly attempting to discuss his way out of a deletion. So, it's good to see a mod conduct itself with some degree of modesty, only meekly coughing up a polite screenshot or two a few weeks before its release. *Rock 24* is one such mod, and even though it thankfully forwent the fanfare, it's turned out to be a refreshingly original creation.

Rock 24 is a prison complex built on the side of a cliff, now used by the Combine to

hold rebels and other miscreants of the *Half-Life 2* universe. You're Gordon Freeman, quantum physicist, inventor of the dipping bird (presumably), and rebel leader – just like a ginger Che Guevara – and you've found yourself on a mission to break a rebel leader out of the impenetrable and eponymous rock.

It all kicks off on a boat, handily stocked with rockets, those self-propelled explosive harbingers of gunships and flying alien things. Pretty soon you're attacked by the former, and find yourself arrested and thrown behind bars. Quite why they don't just kill Gordon Freeman when they have the chance is baffling.

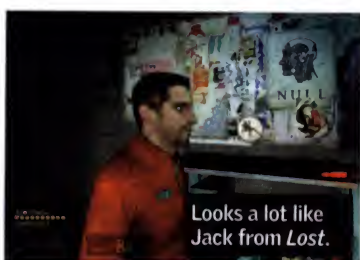
Rock 24 is a series of maps whose original content shows mainly through its relatively decent voice-acting, but the level design on each is comparable to that of the original game, save for a few moments in which the way forward remains obscured long enough to frustrate. It's essentially a reworked version of the Nova Prospekt section of *Half-Life 2*, with lots of conveniently placed barred and locked



doors guiding the level. It's no less linear than *Half-Life* either, but doesn't do as good a job of hiding it.

Despite this, *Rock 24* remains an essential download and is one of the best map-based *Half-Life 2* mods around – and

one that's easily on a par with the similarly designed *Minerva*. It's also got a great parody of the valve-in-the-eye man from the Valve logo, something which I think should rightly feature in every *Half-Life* mod.



FRANCESCO'S LEVELED CREATURES/ITEMS MOD



Steve Hogarty likes his rats weak, with two sugars snipurl.com/francesco | Mod for: Oblivion

CATCHY TITLES ASIDE, this mod is a collaboration of tweaks and tucks intended to turn *Oblivion* away from its slightly broken levelling system and towards a more hardcore, realistic and believable experience.

Whereas before, no matter how hard you tried and no matter how much fighting ability you earned, random NPCs and creatures would always be a challenge, this mod reduces such challenges to more sensible levels. After playing for 100 hours, a wandering bandit will no longer be a hassle, and rats will pretty much evaporate with fear at the sight of your biceps – assuming you're not a namby-pamby wizard sort, that is.

Then it gets a bit in-depth. The mod can also, if you want it to, reduce the chances of finding really good loot, fix the bizarrely designed levelled items system (if you know what that is, you'll know why it was broken), slow the day/night cycle, make guards a whole lot less invulnerable and enhance the economy model. Whether this is an improvement or just pedantic nerdism is up to you to decide, but individual tweaks like these can be turned off.

The mod also comes with an optional, user-made creatures and items pack. This adds ark-loads of new animals to beat on the face with clubs, as well as barrel-loads of new items with which to become hopelessly encumbered.

Play: **MOD**



WOW: THE BURNING CRUSADE & FIGURINES!

Collector's Edition and nine copies of *WOW: The Burning Crusade* up for grabs!

IF THIS MAGAZINE were a big papery Ashenvale forest, then by reading this competition you've been randomly buffed with a 4% increased chance of winning a copy of the *World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade Collector's Edition*, along with some funky and desirable *World Of Warcraft* figurines. The swanky *Collector's Edition* includes (deep breath): CD and DVD copies of the game, a one-month subscription to *WOW*, an art book, a behind-the-scenes DVD, exclusive in-game pet, two *WOW* trading card game starter decks, three exclusive cards, a map of Outlands mousemat and the official soundtrack! But don't despair – even if you don't win this elusive prize, there's still hope. You could quite easily stumble away with one of nine copies of *World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* – the possibilities are almost endless. Unless you answer incorrectly. To win, complete the following quest:

Which of these is a German military decoration awarded to Kriegsmarine members for service on fast-attack crafts or torpedo boats?

- A. World Of Warcraft
- B. An orc
- C. The Fast Attack Craft War Badge (Das Schnellbootkriegsabzeichen)

To enter the competition, simply text PCZWOW, then a space, then either A, B or C followed by your name and address to 80889. Text entries will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. By texting PC ZONE, you're agreeing to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing. If you do not wish to receive info relating to future offers and promotions, text the word NO at the end of your message. You can also send a postcard to *WOW: The Burning Crusade* Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Competition ends January 31, 2007. Entries received after this date will self-destruct in ten seconds. Standard rules apply – see p9.



INTO CERBERON



Steve Hogarty goes down, diddly-down down www.chmodoplusr.com/IntoCerberon | Mod for: Doom 3

MOST PEOPLE, IF you shouted the word 'descent' at them, would stand to attention and tell you that it was a horror movie which received mixed-reviews and had Sarah Michelle Gellar in it, before sitting down and wondering if it really did have Sarah Michelle Gellar in it or had they just made a mistake. What they wouldn't say is that it was a brilliant game from 1995 in which you controlled a space ship that could fly in full 360-degree

space. Up was an ambiguous notion, down was just as indefinable, and the only certainty was that you were playing a nauseating but excellent game.

Into Cerberon for *Doom 3* turns it from a demon shooter into a *Descent* clone, and does it surprisingly well. It introduces a selection of new weapons, ranging from blasty-laser types to loud mini-gun types, and pits a ragtag bunch of angry Internet people against one another across (currently) five maps.

Its dedication to replicating that classic *Descent* feeling of being slapped by at least two dimensions means that initially you'll struggle with the controls, but the more you play the more accustomed you'll become. It's shamefully difficult to get a game online however, and we found ourselves resigned to LAN games in the office.

Also, pat yourself on the back if you can spot the extremely clever reference to the original *Descent* in the mod's title.

Play: **MOD**



Cold as hell, in fact.

Classic: **MOD**



FRONT LINE FORCE Veteran day

www.frontlineforce2.com
Mod for: Half-Life

A RARITY FOR the Classic: Mod column, *Front Line Force* is still being played quite regularly. In fact, I'm willing to guess that there are people playing it right now, oblivious to the fact that we're talking about them. The mod's basis is nothing spectacularly original, but its fast-paced gameplay is as polished and enjoyable as any commercial release.

Set in a nearish-future-setting, your objective was (and still is) to capture certain targets on the map, be it a computer or a laptop, or conversely to defend said target. The quality of its maps and weapons are what really sets *Front Line Force* apart from similar mods of the day, and with a sequel in the pipeline, there's no better time to discover the original.

No place to raise the kids.



Nobody here anyway.



FAWLTY TOWERS



Steve Hogarty doesn't mention the war

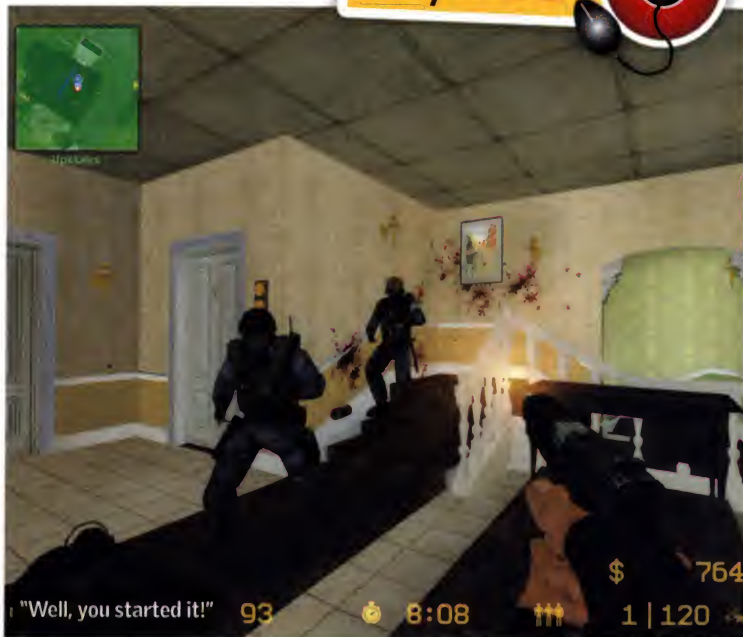
www.kevboy.metalsoup.com/Home.htm | Map for: Counter-Strike: Source

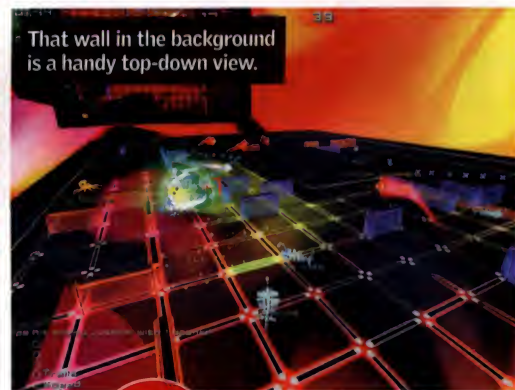
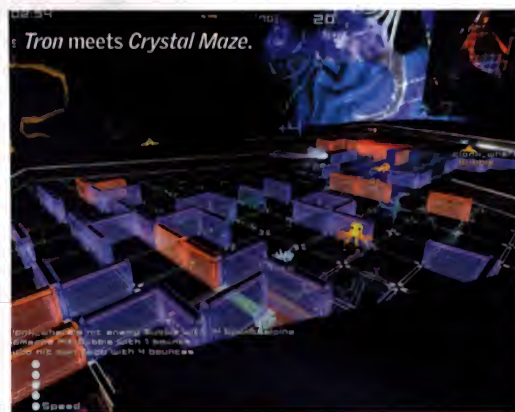
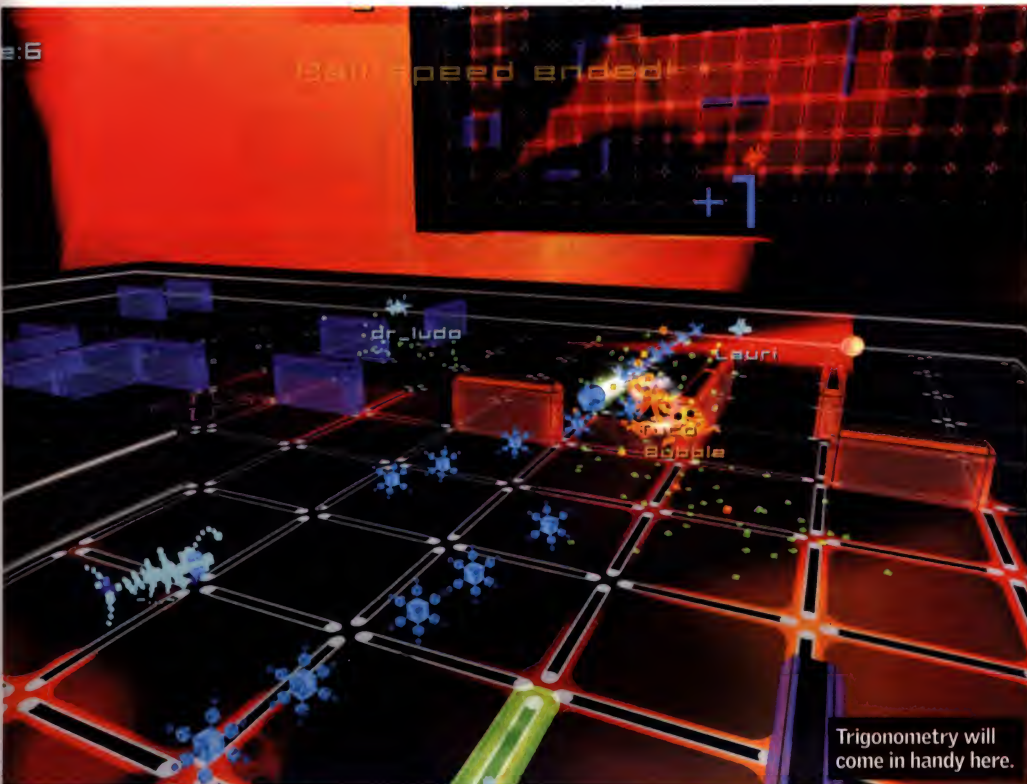
JUST WHEN YOU thought the Internet had let everybody down, just when you thought the flow of zany multiplayer maps had slowed to a pathetic trickle, along comes a map based on possibly the most famous building in British comedy history. It's sadly lacking Basil's car, but we still reckon it's our favourite map ever.

Check out our interview with the inventor of *cs_fawltytowers* on p105, before grabbing it off the DVD and marvelling at just how accurate it is. It's even got the structurally unsound kitchen door, which appears and disappears between rounds. It's got the moose head, O'Reilly's van parked outside, the silly and pointless up and down bit of stairs, and the CT spawn point aligned almost perfectly with the establishing shot of *Fawlty Towers* at the start of each episode.

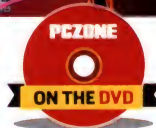
It's the perfect homage to one of our favourite TV shows ever – all we want now is the same treatment for Craggy Island Parochial House.

Play: **MAP**





SPAWNS OF DEFLEBUB



Steve Hogarty has a deflebung set aside for me ludocraft.oulu.fi/deflebung | Mod for: UT2004

LUDOCRAFT, HAVING RELEASED their amazing and quirky *Air Buccaneers* mod for *Unreal Tournament 2004* and cemented their position as top-class mod-makers, went on to create the equally cool but significantly more bat-f***-insane *Dragonfly Variations* for the same game. In doing this, they cemented the opinion that they live on psychotropic narcotics and horse tranquilisers alone.

By no means their third production – and by no means their most insane – is the recently released *Spawns Of Deflebung*, again for *Unreal Tournament 2004*. In it, you control a baby elder god, ostensibly a little spider thing made of glowing 3D pixels. Playing within a small arena, you fire shots which bounce off walls and kill other players.

The crux of the mod lies in the fact that you can build your own walls in order to deflect shots towards your enemy, an idea that at first is an impossible one to grasp. In time though, *Spawns Of Deflebung* becomes an eclectic mix of genres – pool, pinball, *Breakout* – there's a lot of interesting ideas quite literally bouncing around.

Power-ups dotted about the arena offer such bonuses as more ammo and increased trail length on your shots, which not only harms enemies but helps determine their direction and to better position your walls. For the most part, you'll find yourself attempting to enclose rival players, often with the help of a team-mate, by laying down as much wall as possible around them before firing into their freshly built tomb.

The problem is that, despite this being a mod from a respected developer, I haven't found a single server running it, which is just baffling. The only chance of getting a decent game (no bots here) is by organising one with equally enthusiastic players. That might not seem like a massive deal, but can you name four friends who'd want to play this mod with you? A mod with crazy spider things building walls? I doubt you can, which means you'll have to go forum-wandering...

Hopefully by the time this mag's on the shelves somebody will have noticed just how spicy-nice LudoCraft's latest mod is, and will have built a shrine of dedicated servers for the thing. If not, this might be yet another case of an excellent mod being let down by a lacklustre following.





Rise through the ranks in... Battlefield 2142

Welcome to *BF2142*'s equivalent of Sandhurst, where **Richie Shoemaker** will teach you how to earn your stripes

Need:

A copy of *BF2142*
Dodgy British accent
A nice warm coat

What you'll get:

- ✓ Drafted
- ✓ A military education
- ✓ Cheap hookers in faraway places
- ✗ Post-traumatic stress disorder

FORGET ABOUT ALL the fun stuff like shooting people in the face: if you want all the best kit and the respect of your comrades in *Battlefield 2142*, you're going to have to put the work in. In MMOGs they call this 'the grind', but at least here you don't have to hunt rats for hours on end or pay a monthly fee for the privilege. *BF2142*'s currency of experience is the career point, the accumulation of which will bestow you rank and unlock better and more diverse weapons and items. Oh, and make you irresistible to women and increase the value of your share portfolio, among other things...



01 HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

OK, if this is something you haven't quite grasped after reading endless fawning previews and reviews, let's say this one last time: *Battlefield 2142* is a team game. If you prefer to sit in the corner at this party, you'll likely end up bored and frustrated. So, as soon as you log in, join a squad, even if you have no altruistic intentions. Why? Because you'll get extra career points that you don't get by playing alone. For example, if you kill an enemy during a squad attack on a pinned objective order, you also get an extra point – so the more you do as a team, the more experience to spend on those unlocks.



02 A little bit of what you fancy

Obviously you need to play on low-ping servers, preferably with a few people on them, but there are a few other pointers too if you want to maximise your fun investment. If you're new to the game, avoid the Titan mode for now. Apart from being laggy, the maps can take a long time to learn. Instead, stick to the Conquest mode you know and love, with small maps. Remember, it's your squad-mates who'll help you bring home the points, and less squads on smaller maps means less stress for your commander, which equates to a better chance of winning.



03 I LIKE TO MOVE IT, MOVE IT

If you find yourself with a squad leader who never gives orders, or keeps giving you 'move to' commands, leave the squad immediately. He may be a supreme tactical genius, but successfully reaching that tree up ahead doesn't gain you any extra experience. You only get objective-financed career points by attacking or defending an objective. Similarly, if you're a squad leader, issue only attack or defend orders (ie, set orders on control points). What's more, if you can do it without having to pull up the in-game map – in others words always have the '3D map' active – all the better.



04 Command points

Even if you're not a natural born leader, at times you will find yourself squad leader simply because everyone else is too chicken to do it (you'll be amazed how many people there are who fear taking charge). If you do find yourself holding the baton, just go with it. The reason is quite simple: squad leaders earn points from all the members of their squad. Each kill that one of your squad makes within a radius of one of your orders is an extra point for you. The trick is to make sure you keep your orders updated and make sure you respond to your Commander. And you never know, you may find that you actually start to enjoy bullying people.



07 HEAL THYSELF

The trick with playing the Assault class early on in your career is to know when to be a gun-toting badass, and when to put the nurse's uniform on. If things are quiet and you have a colleague nearby, it makes sense to open up or drop the medi-hub – after all, it's a good way to get cheap experience. Don't get carried away though – without a defrib, you'll find yourself more often than not arriving late with the bandages. Until you get the defrib, be a soldier first and a doctor second. And use short bursts – always short bursts.



05 RECON MAN

Although the Recon kit can be quite adaptable once you 'skill up', to begin with this character is pretty much only good for one thing – spotting the enemy, and hopefully planting a bullet in them. Once the preserve of the lone wolf, Recon is pretty much the de facto choice for the thoughtful squad leader: someone who can either scout ahead or stay back a little and look for targets, then report back regarding enemy troop strengths. With the right squad Field Upgrades, you can even set up a secret spawn location. One thing you don't want to be doing with this character is storming a front line.

06 Supporting role

Unsurprisingly, the Support kit is the probably the most popular choice for new players, thanks to the heavy MG weapon – but mostly because you can ignore all those calls for medical aid that invariably fill your headphones. The trick with this guy is to support (geddit) your front line troops. Let the Assault guys go first, as their weapons are far more accurate on the move, and either give suppressive fire from a flank, or, if you're advancing with them, drop and wait for your aim to steady before letting rip. And when you hole up with your squad, always – *always* – drop an ammo hub and watch the points roll in.



08 MR BIG GUN, LITTLE GUN

To begin with, the engineer is one of the trickiest soldier classes to master, but he's actually one of the most useful and versatile, with an outdoor at-range skill for crippling vehicles. Plus, against infantry his short-range weapon is just as accurate as the standard Assault weapon (even if it's a bit piddly). The trick is to again play to your supporting role, in this case by fixing machines, which is the best way to bring in the points. The danger though is to always panic under fire. If you're in vehicle-hunting mode, think like a sniper; take your time and always go for weak spots. **PCZ**

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Fight Club



The third rule of Fight Club is... Don't play against the devs

THE HILARIOUS INEPTITUDE of *ZONE* writer and *ZONE* reader alike made this month's Fight Club one of the most memorable of the year. Confusion reigned as we struggled with the rampart-building antics of *HL2: Sourceforts*. Building blocks were hurriedly chucked in a big pile and people asked how to rotate the long bits so that they were the right

way round. Proud of our little fort, we watched in horror as the dividing wall rolled away to reveal the perfectly designed fort of the red team, who also happened to be the guys who designed the mod (cheers fellas).

The next Fight Club is at 6pm on Thursday, Jan 11, where we'll be back to *CS: Source*, including the *cs_fawtytowers* map (see pages 105 and 110). Join us!



Just like a little virtual ant colony.

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"Brandon Routh awaaaay!"

ZONE CHAT



Where civilisation and puerility meet to blow raspberries at each other

CONVERSATION THIS MONTH veered away from the usual anticipation about upcoming PC games, after we'd got the excitement about *Star Trek: Legacy* out of our systems. Young Will followed the sci-fi trend and decided to tell everyone what he'd been watching on the telly. Mainly it's what you'd expect of a games journalist. *Battlestar Galactica*, *24* and *Torchwood*. Here's to reinforcing those stereotypes, Porter.

Then, after an overwhelming wave of demands, we kicked off the compo. I mean, honestly! We want to chat with you, you know. Not just come around once a month to drop off a present then go back to our empty flats. Sniff.

Having said that, the compo prize this month was that rarest of beasts – a desirable thing. The classic *Civilization* series has just been re-released as a retrospective *Chronicles* boxset, featuring all the games, expansions and some tech tree posters and what not. Sadly, we're too embarrassed to print the picture that won the prize. It's one thing awarding a prize to a faeco-urological joke, and another to print it in a highbrow mag like *PC ZONE*. So we've printed one that more properly reflects our sense of innate panache instead.

The next *ZONE* Chat will be at 5:30pm on January 10, 2007. How futuristic does that sound, eh? I bet we'll all be riding robot ponies or something.

Ambiguity personified.



How to join in!



If you fancy joining the *ZONE* Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps due to a crippling case of camera shyness in the face of our rampant screenshotting – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some *PC ZONE* staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1 SWAT 4
swat4.zonegames.co.uk

2 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015

3 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

4 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

5 BATTLEFIELD 1942
DC MODDED
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567

6 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

7 WOLFENSTEIN:
ENEMY TERRITORY
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960

8 UNREAL
TOURNAMENT 2004
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
ut2.zonegames.co.uk:8888

9 CALL OF DUTY
cod.zonegames.co.uk:28960

10 JOINT OPERATIONS:
TYPHOON RISING
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Retro ZONE

It's the page that makes you wonder why anybody's bothered making games for the past 20 years...

GAME BOY ADVANCE



EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

Listen very carefully...

Emulating a handheld that's so recent is going beyond our usual cheeky nonchalance and sailing towards proper piracy, so we feel obliged to warn you away from downloading *Over The Hedge* or similar. However, there's a world of homebrew games that you can play on the emulator (or put onto Flash ROM cartridges and play in your GBA or DS) that will keep you entertained for, oh, dozens of minutes, before you resume your trawl for the illegal stuff. Not that we approve of that, you tinker.

Links...

1 **Visual Boy Advance**
vba.ngemu.com
Home of VisualBoyAdvance

2 **GBA Dev**
gbadev.org
The site for your homebrew games

THE GAME BOY ADVANCE seems a hazy world away, even though you can still slot *Pokémon LeafGreen* into the bottom of your DS Lite. There's been the SP, the Micro and the eyebrow-raising design of the original DS to bridge the gap. If someone were to tell me – as they just did – that the GBA first hit the shops just over five years ago, I would call them insane, before checking my facts. Then I'd spend a few minutes by the coffee machine in a stubborn bid to not admit I was wrong.

It certainly feels full-on retro; compared to the DS Lite, and especially the PSP, the GBA feels like a badly-lit ghost from the mid-'90s. It had its moments of incredible innovation; *Wario Twisted* turned the machine into a PS3 controller (miaow), and *Boktai* featured



With no backlight, you had to shine on *Harvest Moon*. LOL.



Oh, Kitty. Did the snowman do a rude?



This simply isn't valid in any way.

Rock defeats scissors

You Win.

a UV sensor which required you to collect sunlight during the day to use at night.

The innovation didn't always work, though. Using the GBA with a link cable to control Tingle on your TV in *Wind Waker* felt transparently like a needless ploy to force completists to buy the accessories. But you can't stay angry with Nintendo for too long, can you? They're so cute and dinky... Look at their little faces.

Flash ROM cartridges have long been available, and although that does probably mean that a few naughty types have been playing *Yu-Gi-Oh* without the proper payments, it also means that bedroom developers have been able to make and distribute their homebrew games. Most of which, it has to be said, are rubbish. But then, so were the Austin Powers games, and they cost money.

SIX OF THE BEST

Homebrew games you might like to play in a legal way...

QUAX
Frantic platforming with fruit and gems. You turn into a roast duck when you die, which is truly retro.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2D
Couldn't get off the first screen or get the gun to work, but it's still a faithful rendition of the boat's deck.

VULKANON
Take the Kenta Cho games, take out the collision detection and polish, and oh, 'ello, it's *Vulkanon*.

MERCURY STORM
Kinda like *Metal Slug*. Only the sense of impossibility kicks in after ten seconds in this one.

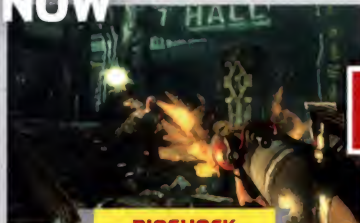
BUST-A-MOVE
Faithful reproduction of the Taito puzzler. Probably not quite as legal as the others because of that.

STRIP POKER
Since when did a pair of kings beat three fives, you lying, and I might add fully-clothed, lady?

NOW & THEN

Bioshock vs Sonic The Hedgehog

NOW



BIOSHOCK

THEN



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

BEFORE YOU CLOSE the magazine in disgust at the new depths of tenuousness to which we've sunk, there's a perfectly good reason why *Sonic The Hedgehog* is the spiritual forerunner to *Bioshock*'s stem cell-harvesting antics. There's underwater bits in both, for starters. And in 1993, a protein was discovered that created Sonic-like spines in fruit flies when it mutated.

When they chose the name for the stem cell proteins, scientists ensured

that they'd be forced to say "Sonic-Hedgehog" in the middle of serious ethical discussions for years to come. It's this kind of high-level scientific

research that we know you've come to expect from us here at **PC ZONE**.

Of course, *System Shock 2* is probably a bit more relevant from a gaming point of view, and we've rummaged deep in our annals to dig out the old demo. There appears to be problems getting the vintage



PLAY IT!

We covered *Sonic The Hedgehog* a couple of months ago, so here's how you can play the infinitely superior *System Shock 2*.

- 1 Put the cover DVD in your PC. If you've already done this, congratulations on being keen, but remember that nobody likes a smart-arse.
- 2 Follow the delightful on-screen menus that have been put together by our incredible Ms Wallace.
- 3 It's recent enough not to require DOSbox, so it's just a matter of installing it in the usual, mouse-clicky way.
- 4 If you want to play the rest of the game, the full version is easy to get hold of, but in ways that are so illegal that we can't bring ourselves to think of them.

software to run with some dual-core processors, but if you're that well off, why don't you buy another computer to play this? You big rich sod.

MAME FRAME

Jon Blyth in the Fantasy Zone Developer: Sega | Year: 1985

SO, THIS GAME'S set in the Fantasy Zone, eh Sega? You don't fool us. Fantasy Zone is nothing more than an excuse to throw a bunch of random sprites at my jetpack-sporting hero. It's the oldest excuse in the book for putting cyclopic mammoths, dragons, butterflies and Easter Island heads in one game. "Of course there's no logic to it," the developers reply. "Welcome to the Fantasy Zone! Get ready!"

The joystick control for coin-op *Space Harrier* encouraged wrestling,

and if you were lucky enough to live close to a posh arcade with the sit-down hydraulic version which moved according to your flails, then you probably spent a long time watching other people play it before you got a go.

What's more, if you were me, you'd be too scared to go on it while people were watching, and you'd get up at 7am on a Saturday morning so you could hang around outside the arcade before it opened and play it before the big boys arrived. Pathetic? And proud.



SPACE HARRIER



Double-skull dragon!



Whatever, single-flesh dragon. You're hardly a double-skull dragon, are you?

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is an emulator for over 6,000 arcade games, and is perfectly legal. However, on its own it's useless, and requires ROMs to play all the old coin-ops. These ROMs are copyrighted, so it's illegal to own them unless you own the arcade machine. We're not nagging, we're just letting you know.

BACK IN THE DAY...



BART VS. THE SPACE MUTANTS

By Steve Hogarty

I vaguely remember playing this when it first came out, and getting to a point in some level in a museum before the thing would crash. Right up until that point though, *The Simpsons: Bart vs. The Space Mutants* was a really good game in which Bart had to do things to purple objects for no apparent reason. I seem to remember him covering them up with cloth, spray-painting them a different colour and using cherry bombs to scare them away. There was also a completely out-of-place platforming bit in Springfield Mall which featured an impossible jump. Actually, now that I think back, I don't think I really liked *Bart vs. The Space Mutants* all that much. In fact, it was balls.



"No F*ing Lightweights!"**



computerandvideogames.com

"Addicted since 1981, reborn in 2006"

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill continues his adventures in *Guild Wars: Nightfall*...

BACK IN THE wonderful world of *Nightfall*, it's like I've never been away. Mainly because I haven't. Due to ferocious Christmas deadlines, I'm being forced to write this almost immediately after the previous instalment. It's a cruel and unusual punishment, and a counter-productive one: to be this good takes ages.

Nevertheless, I'm a born grafter, and despite fighting exhaustion I haul myself back into the cape and head off into the badlands of Elona. Previously led by the hand by a helpful PR cross-dresser, this time I walk alone, except for my mute companion Koss. Imperilled by giant insects and flowers, we fend them off successfully, Koss with some intricate swordplay, me with a giant hammer.

It's a lonely business, and as if to remind me of the futility of my existence, a message appears: "You have been playing for 1 hour." I'm considering ending it all, when out of the wilderness comes a lone voice: "And there was I thinking the PCZ guys went to bed early." Chillli Whirly – for it is he – agrees to meet up, and predictably turns out to be an attractive young woman.

"Nice threads," (s)he says, eyeing me up and down.

"You look like a whore," I reply, ever the charmer.

"Yeah," says Chillli Whirly. "It's my slutty look but without the suzzies."

"Nice threads,"
(s)he says, eyeing
me up. "You look
like a whore," I
reply, charming
as ever...

"Let me guess," I say. "You're really a bloke." Still enamoured with my garb, Chillli compliments my "nice spandex top" and asks if I've, "been watching too many Human League videos".

DON'T YOU WANT ME?

Good. Not only is Chillli Whirly clearly a man, but he's old enough to remember early '80s synth-pop combos. And he spends his nights pretending to be a woman in a fantasy world...

All the same, at this moment in time he's my only friend in the world. In fairness, he's eager to help and launches into one of my missions with gusto, effortlessly laying waste to a horde of juvenile-bladed termites.

"I need a termite leg," I announce, remembering a distant quest.

"Just the one?" chirps Chillli, and I attempt to trade some clothing for it.

"Didn't want ya fancy dress," he says.

"Not my colour." Nevertheless, he gives me the insect limb in question for free. In fact, he gives me three, and I'm actually

boring myself as I write these words.

Chilli Whirly is a blur of enthusiasm though, cheerfully announcing that he has a "better slut outfit". Warily turning round to see what clichéd affair he's come up with, I'm surprised to see that he's now made of wood.

"You look like a tree," I point out.

"Yeah, working in the Special branch," he quips. I'll do the gags.

With Chillli Whirly's help, I soon reach the heady heights of level 5, and receive a battle commendation for my efforts, a proud moment in a young Dervish's life.

Pressing on, Chillli is keen to help me on another quest. No sooner do I explain that I need to collect some Iboga petals (to make a salad or something) than he's hacking away at them, aided by his level-20 hero, Dunkoro.

To be honest, I don't really need to be here, and find myself standing around like a foreman while he gets on with the job. That said, I do interject to tell him that he's slaughtering the wrong type of Iboga. In his haste, he's been decimating the local

populace of Fanged Iboga, when in fact it's the blossom of the Beautiful Iboga I need.

It's a schoolboy error, but he's keen to rectify it, surging ahead with the claim, "there's better places for Iboga petals". I'm sure there are, but health and safety issues forbid me from looking for them. "You've been playing for two hours. Please take a break," says the game.

"Let's rock," says Chillli Whirly.

FLOWERS OF ROMANCE


I'm not entirely sure that two grown men – one dressed as a woman – looking for flowers constitutes rocking, but I go along with it anyway. Following a flurry of flower felling, I have nine of the required 12 petals. "OK, only a few more," surmises Chillli. "Let's rock!"

I turn to follow him, and am surprised to see that he's shed his clothes to reveal her lithe young body, her modesty protected only by a few scraps of wispy material.

"You're naked!" I exclaim.

"It's fresh air to air orifices," says Chillli, confusingly. "It's kind of liberating."

With the accursed blossoms finally collected, I sense our time together is drawing to a close. With the time nudging 4am, I bid farewell to my cross-dressing accomplice, who says: "I'm off for a cool pint of Carling."

"You have been playing for three hours," says the game. "Please take a break." 



SUPERTEST

MOST ANTICIPATED GAME OF 2007

What is it? What is it?
The suspense is killing us...



YOUR VIEW

Last month we banged on about zombies. Here are your shuffling thoughts...

Half-Life 2

"You can chop them up, set light to them and splash them with paint – it's a tour de force. The bit where the propeller-trap breaks, leaving you surrounded by a crowd of shufflies is a classic moment in gaming."

csdaveuk

Warhammer 40K: Dawn Of War – Dark Crusade

"You might say that it doesn't feature zombies. Well, no, but it does have the Necron. Resurrecting RTS troops FTW."

Dogen_D_Derrible

Resident Evil 4

"I hadn't owned a console since the Mega Drive, but after playing this I was simply blown away. I purchased the special RE4 GameCube pack shortly after, and have never said the word 'wow!' so many times. I still can't believe it worked as well as it did. It was like some sort of dirty console dream."

Corporate_Sniper

Dead Rising

"The only game that's come anywhere near getting zombies right is *Dead Rising* – all other games with zombies in suck in comparison. The zombies are slow and lumbering and they attack en masse (as they should). One zombie is easy to dispatch, an entire group is difficult. No PC game has good zombies."

DarthMorbus

2006 HAS BEEN... Well, it's been a year, hasn't it? Another 1.5% of everyone's life has been demoted from thrilling aspirations to fading memories, and we've all probably sighed to ourselves and thought: "Well, I hope 2007 is a bit better for games."

2006 was good, but not thrilling. We've had some great games – *Oblivion*, *Company Of Heroes*, *GTR2*, but nothing to leave you breathless on the rockery, wondering what just kicked you out of the patio doors. If we were to manipulate the statistics to squeeze out the most shocking statement possible, we could say that we've given out as many Classic awards over the whole of 2006 as we did in the last two issues of 2005.

We're as far from jaded as it's possible to be though – without being perpetually aghast morons, of course – but it seems this year has been spent rubbing our

hands together about what's to come. *Alan Wake*, *Spore*, *Crysis*, *Quake Wars*, *BioShock*, *Assassin's Creed*, *The Burning Crusade*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Jericho*, *Supreme Commander*, *Resident Evil 4*... If 2007 were a bra, the strap would twang with a satisfying firmness, and Old Father Time would slap you and giggle.

With such a strong collection of games to froth about, it's virtually impossible to focus the gush on one title in particular. But one name featured in everyone's top two. We can't wait to dive into the creepy art-deco world of *BioShock*, as you'll hear on the special podcast-type thing on our DVD this month.

But what's the game that's making you consider cryostasis as a means of passing the intervening time? Log onto www.pczone.co.uk, join the forums and tell us. The best comments get printed on the left. Can you imagine how good that feels? Csdaveuk can – can you? **PCZ**



What is the most anticipated game of 2007? Jamie's unsure...



Log thinks it'll be round like a melon (Gala variety)...



Hang on, does Will have the answer up his nose?



"Sorry? What? Can't hear you!"

Someone's been shopping at Gap.

If 2007 were a bra, the strap would twang with a satisfying firmness

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DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

X3: REUNION

Jon Blyth goes beyond the frontier, avoids the threat and joins the reunion



EGOSOFT'S MANAGING DIRECTOR is Bernd Lehahn (right), and he presides over the company who're responsible for the many adventures you might have had in the freeform X universe. The X series have been scoring Classic awards in *PC ZONE* since issue 83.

X3: Reunion picks up where *X2* left off, with the insectoid Kha'ak determined to sod up the universe for anything without a carapace. Lehahn talks to us about the series, the difficulties of forcing a storyline into a freeform universe, the pursuit of realism and the dedication of some of their players...



And so, the big question:
can they hear you scream?

01 **X2:** "X2 was a good step ahead from *X: Beyond The Frontier* and *X-Tension*, but in retrospect we made a couple of bad decisions. In particular, the way we presented the plot in *X2* could have been better. The cut-scenes were a problem, the dialogue was sometimes too long and the plot in general didn't come across as good as it should have for these reasons. This is a constant dilemma that we fight with through all episodes of the *X* games: how can we encourage the player into a linear story in an otherwise freeform game?"



02 **RAISING YOUR GAME:** "The *X* series has become our only project and source of income. It's almost a child, and we all love working on it. So the moment it became successful, we knew we were going to continue working on this. There are so many ideas and things to improve that we knew, even in 1996 when the series was started, that we could work on this game for a very long time.

"In 2004 we started working on an expansion for *X2* – new missions, stations and ships, but inside the same 'hull' (gameplay, interface etc). At the same time, we started work on a new graphics engine and a modified user interface which we internally named *X3*. In March 2005, we decided to concentrate all our work on a single project and scrapped the idea of an expansion for *X2*."

Even Simon Cowell couldn't argue
- this series has the 'X' factor.



03 X3: "We looked at what failed in X2 and simply did that better. So, the top priority was a well-told storyline and good missions. We wanted to make the game more appealing to what we call the 'Wing Commander audience'. That is, those people who don't know *Elite*-type games and play our game because of the freedom and economy, but also expect a story and cool fighting missions. So we added content that we thought would help make the game more appealing to these type of players. I'm sure that an audience like this would then also begin to love the freeform gameplay and the advantages that a realistic economy adds to such a game, but we had to catch them first..."



Gaining a Classic award, the X series
carried on where *Elite* left off.

04 GOOD GRAPHICS: "Pushing the limit graphically is always a top priority for us. But with X3: *Reunion*, for the first time we used the chance of the engine switch for a redesign. We wanted to overcome some things we didn't like about the old games, such as the scale of certain objects. From X:*BTF* to X:*Tension* to X2: *The Threat*, we always had to stick with the same scale of objects and didn't redesign the game graphically from scratch. With X3: *Reunion*, we had the chance to do just that and could correct a lot of logical scale problems. For instance, does a person actually fit into this cockpit? Do the ships fit into the docking bay? Does the carrier really carry that many ships? We always wanted this to look realistic, but with X2, we still couldn't quite do it."



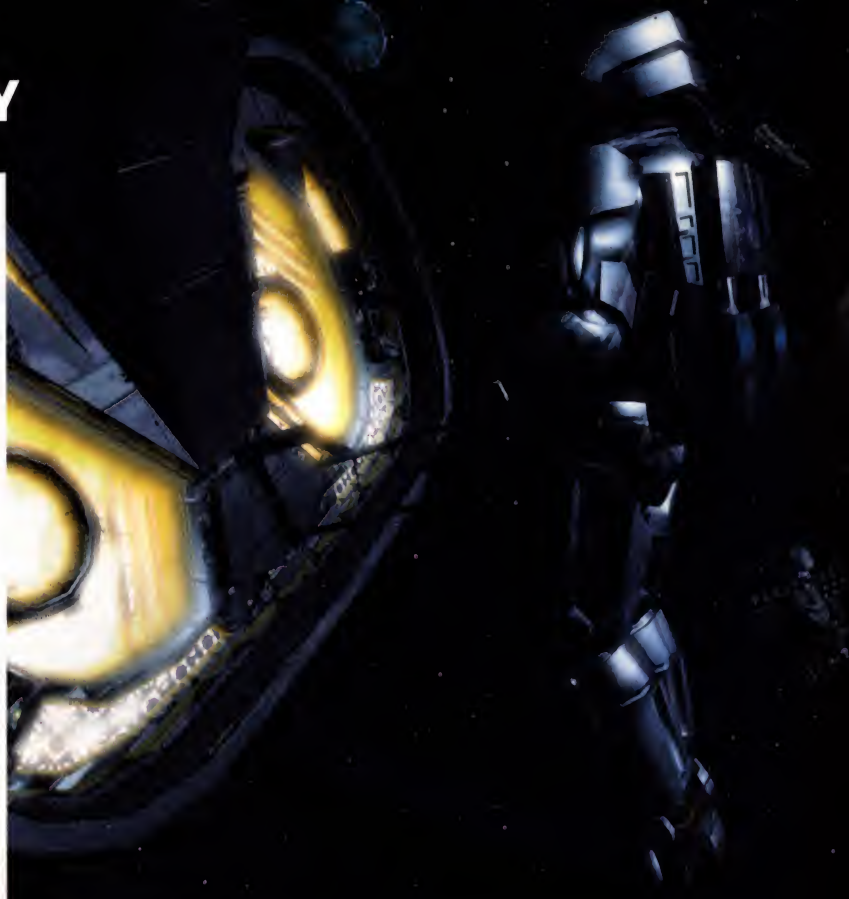
X3: as pretty as Miss World holding
a steak-and-kidney pie. Hmmm, pie.

LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

05 GUIDING THE PLAYER: "Our attitude to guiding the player within our freeform universe changes over time. If you'd asked me during the making of *X3: Reunion*, I would have said it's very important to guide the player, as we wanted to make the game more accessible to the *Wing Commander* types. But right now, my answer would be different again. As *X3* has been out for a while, we've had a chance to rethink entirely how to put a story into our otherwise completely non-linear game, and also where these priorities are. The game is designed entirely for the freeform aspect, but a linear story exists inside of it."



Flying high, high, it's a bird in the sky. Oh, OK, it's a spaceship in space. You're so picky.



06 X3TREME PLAY: "We've seen some incredible things from our players. We've seen save-games and read reports on our forums from people who pushed our game to its limits: building gigantic fleets, taking over sectors, building several thousand stations, 6,000 in-game hours for a single player, 50-billion credits... Everything. All of these extreme and unpredictable scenarios are probably a reason why our forums are so popular, with well over a million posted articles in less than three years. When you invest that much time and effort into a game, you want to show it to the world."



No cockpit means you can see the prettiness unobstructed.

07 NO COCKPIT: "The user interface was redesigned and there was no real use for a cockpit anymore. Of course, we could still have displayed a cockpit as a decorative object, but we didn't want to spend a lot of time and effort to design a feature which would then just be turned off by the majority of players because it lacks any function and just blocks your view."



The much improved story of *X3* was written by ex-Byker Grove writer Andrew Walsh.



Our advice? Whatever you do, don't let go...

"We've seen some incredible things from players... building gigantic fleets, taking over sectors, 6,000 in-game hours for a single-player, 50-billion credits"

Bernd Lehahn, managing director, Egosoft



09 STORYTELLING: "Although the story was far better than that of *X2: The Threat*, and certainly didn't have the problems with cut-scenes and dialogue, I feel that we still haven't found the best method of integrating a story into this otherwise freeform game. I'm not saying it's bad, as I certainly don't intend to make our own game look bad, but for the type of game *X3* is, it's not as good as it could be. For example, the mini-games that we intended as teasers to lead into the game didn't work quite as well as we'd hoped. Fortunately, the atmosphere develops out of the game world as much as the plot. After *X3* was done, we all sat down and thought a lot about how we'll tell a story in a game like this in the future."

08 ANDREW WALSH, WRITER:

"I first got in contact with Andy in 2004 through a friend at our English publisher. At that time, we were in discussions with several professional scriptwriters, but Andy had the large benefit of not just being very talented but also knowing and liking the *X* fiction. He did give *X3* a pretty complex story with better dialogue than any of the older *X* games.

The main elements of the plot were decided upfront already, but Andy was pretty free in how to tell that story. However, we wanted to have a certain mission structure and this led to the events of the main story step by step."



10 DOCKING: "We took out spacestation docking for the sake of realism. Our internal sceneries were never designed to truly fit into the stations they were used for (*X2*'s spacestations had a strange Tardis-like feel). Our aim was to create as realistic a universe as possible within the limitations set, with the best possible gameplay. So, we'll never consider using more Newtonian flight physics, for example. Once we realised that there was a problem with the docking, we were in a position to react very quickly and release improved versions of the game. So a large part of our customers never experienced any problems with docking." **PCZ**

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And the burning question:
what's your favourite cocktail?

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on sale Thursday, February 1. Buy your Valentine's
chocolates now to avoid the last-minute rush!



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NEXT MONTH

EXCLUSIVE!

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION – SHIVERING ISLES

We reveal everything you need to know about
the role-playing game expansion of the year!
Featuring never-seen-before screens and
incredible gameplay details from the torn
realm of Sheogorath!



PARABELLUM
FPS scoop! Hands-on
with the trigger-happy
Counter-Strike challenger



LOTR ONLINE
Shadows Of Angmar
played! Exclusive live
report from Middle-earth



GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE
Scandal! Unmissable exposé
of Infinium Labs' PC-based
Phantom console!



CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
Hell to play! Exclusive feature on the
gory horror-shooter from the twisted
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REVIEWED!
Supreme Commander
Star Trek: Legacy
Sam & Max: Episode Two

ALSO! Steve Hill's *Guild Wars NeverQuest*, Phil
Wand's essential PC gaming hardware tips and reviews,
and a stupendous amount of free games in Freeplay!

**ON SALE
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INTRODUCING

The fab new
glossy weekly from
the makers of

PCZONE

FASHION!

Sophie Ellis-Bextor looks amazing coming out of a PvP session in Alterac Valley. That belt is simply... Enchanting, and available from high-level vendors in a trendy Darnassian boutique. But hang on! What's this?

You **HAVEN'T** got mail! You went into battle in a warped cloak? You're not a priest love, splash out on some armour!



Phew! Nice tattered bracers, Soph! Where did you get those? From the carcass of a level two mana worm? **Roflopolis!**

The magazine for the woman with XP

WOW!



REAL LIFE!

"Experience isn't everything - high-level Dwarf Warrior makes hot emotes with noob!"

24 hours with **THE DARK LADY**

INSIDER SCOOP!

Geri's concerned pals speak out

"ALL SHE EATS IS STRINGY WOLF-MEAT!"

GET AN INSTANCE!

Flirting trolls put orcs off their missions in The Barrens

GOSSIP!

Spotted!

- Big Brother's **Pete** levelling-up after cashing in a quest in **Ogrimmar** and ignoring the adoring fans saying "grats"!
- Newly-weds **Tom Cruise** and **Katie Holmes** standing next to a crashed spaceship and looking smug on Azuremyst Isle!
- **Amy Winehouse** coming out of the off-licence in **Stormwind City** - of course it's medicinal, dear...
- **Britney Spears** climbing off a giant bat in the Undercity without her knickers equipped!
- **David Gest** jumping and turning around in a graveyard near **Tarren Mill**!
- **Charlotte Church** - away from keyboard for 20 minutes - should Gavin wait?

REAL LIFE!

'I SAW MY TERRY GET EATEN BY WORGs'

By long-suffering wife **June Whitfield**

"First his deckchair collapsed while he was drinking orange juice, then he missed out on a promotion because he's rubbish at bridge. We decided to relax looking for some herbs.

"To cap it all, he aggroed a couple of Worgs, who tore the flesh from his bones in agonising strips. I can still hear him screaming: 'Heal me! Don't just watch! It really hurts, all over! God, not the face! Ow, my face!'

"When he came home, the resurrection process had ruined the new shirt I'd made for him - typical, selfish man!"



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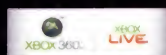
UNPRECEDENTED CONTROL



AIR, SEA & UNDERSEA ACTION



ONLINE MULTIPLAYER



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